THE PRICE

FRANCIS LYNDE

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BY

FRANCIS LYNDE

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THE TAMING OF RED BUTTE WESTERN, ETC.

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To

MR. LATHROP BROCKWAY BULLENE

SOLE FRIEND OF MY BOYHOOD, WHO WILL RECALL BETTER THAN ANY THE YOUTHFUL MORAL AND SOCIAL SEED-TIME WHICH HAS LED TO THIS LATER HARVESTING OF CONCLUSION, THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	At Chaudière's	1
II.	Spindrift	9
III.	The Right of Might	16
IV.	*Io Triumphe!*	26
V.	The *Belle Julie*	34
VI.	The Deck-Hand	44
VII.	Gold of Tolosa	53
VIII.	The Chain-Gang	59
IX.	The Middle Watch	68
X.	Quicksands	75
XI.	The Anarchist	84
XII.	Moses Ichthyophagus	94
XIII.	Griswold Emergent	110
XIV.	Philistia	116
XV.	The Goths and Vandals	126
XVI.	Good Samaritans	143
XVII.	Gropings	154
XVIII.	The Zweibund	165
XIX.	Loss and Gain	175

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.	The Convalescent	187
XXI.	Broffin's Equation	201
XXII.	In the Burglar-Proof	218
XXIII.	Converging Roads	234
XXIV.	The Forward Light	248
XXV.	The Bridge of Jehennam	260
XXVI.	Pitfalls	274
XXVII.	In the Shadows	286
XXVIII.	Broken Links	295
XXIX.	All That a Man Hath	312
XXX.	The Valley of Dry Bones	332
XXXI.	Narrowing Walls	347
XXXII.	The Lion's Share	354
XXXIII.	Gates of Brass	368
XXXIV.	The Abyss	375
XXXV.	Margery's Answer	384
XXXVI.	The Gray Wolf	396
XXXVII.	The Quality of Mercy	408
XXXVIII.	The Pendulum-Swing	416
XXXIX.	Dust and Ashes	428
XL.	Apples of Istakhar	438
XLI.	The Desert and the Sown	448

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I

AT CHAUDIÈRE'S

In the days when New Orleans still claimed distinction as the only American city without trolleys, sky-scrapers, or fast trains—was it yesterday? or the day before?—there was a dingy, cobwebbed café in an arcade off Camp Street which was well-beloved of newspaperdom; particularly of that wing of the force whose activities begin late and end in the small hours.

"Chaudière's," it was called, though I know not if that were the name of the round-faced, round-bodied little Marseillais who took toll at the desk. But all men knew the fame of its gumbo and its stuffed crabs, and that its claret was neither very bad nor very dear. And if the walls were dingy and the odors from the grille pungent and penetrating at times, there went with the white-sanded floor, and the marble-topped tables for two, an Old-World air of recreative comfort which is rarer now, even in New Orleans, than it was yesterday or the day before.

It was at Chaudière's that Griswold had eaten his first breakfast in the Crescent City; and it was at Chaudière's again that he was sharing a fare-

well supper with Bainbridge, of the *Louisianian*. Six weeks lay between that and this; forty-odd days of discouragement and failure superadded upon other similar days and weeks and months. The breakfast, he remembered, had been garnished with certain green sprigs of hope; but at the supper-table he ate like a barbarian in arrears to his appetite and the garnishings were the bitter herbs of humiliation and defeat.

Without meaning to, Bainbridge had been strewing the path with fresh thorns for the defeated one. He had just been billeted for a run down the Central American coast to write up the banana trade for his paper, and he was boyishly jubilant over the assignment, which promised to be a zestful pleasure trip. Chancing upon Griswold in the first flush of his elation, he had dragged the New Yorker around to Chaudière's to play second knife and fork at a small parting feast. Not that it had required much persuasion. Griswold had fasted for twenty-four hours, and he would have broken bread thankfully with an enemy. And if Bainbridge were not a friend in a purist's definition of the term, he was at least a friendly acquaintance.

Until the twenty-four-hour fast was in some measure atoned for, the burden of the table-talk fell upon Bainbridge, who lifted and carried it generously on the strength of his windfall. But no topic can be immortal; and when the vacation under pay had been threshed out in all its anticipatory details it occurred to the host that his guest was less than

usually responsive; a fault not to be lightly condoned under the joyous circumstances. Wherefore he protested.

"What's the matter with you to-night, Kenneth, old man? You're more than commonly grumpy, it seems to me; and that's needless."

Griswold took the last roll from the joint bread-plate and buttered it methodically.

"Am I?" he said. "Perhaps it is because I am more than commonly hungry. But go on with your joy-talk: I'm listening."

"That's comforting, as far as it goes; but I should think you might say something a little less carefully polarized. You don't have a chance to congratulate lucky people every day."

Griswold looked up with a smile that was almost ill-natured, and quoted cynically: "'Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.'"

Bainbridge's laugh was tolerant enough to take the edge from his retort.

"That's a pretty thing to fling at a man who never knifed you or pistoled you or tried to poison you! An innocent by-stander might say you envied me."

"I do," rejoined Griswold gravely. "I envy any man who can earn enough money to pay for three meals a day and a place to sleep in."

"Oh, cat's foot!—anybody can do that," asserted Bainbridge, with the air of one to whom the

struggle for existence has been a mere athlete's practice run.

"I know; that is your theory. But the facts disprove it. I can't, for one."

"Oh, yes, you could, if you'd side-track some of your own theories and come down to sawing wood like the rest of us. But you won't do that."

Griswold was a fair man, with reddish hair and beard and the quick and sensitive skin of the type. A red flush of anger crept up under the closely cropped beard, and his eyes were bright.

"That is not true, and you know it, Bainbridge," he contradicted, speaking slowly lest his temper should break bounds. "Is it my fault, or only my misfortune, that I can do nothing but write books for which I can't find a publisher? Or that the work of a hack-writer is quite as impossible for me as mine is for him?"

Bainbridge scoffed openly; but he was good-natured enough to make amends when he saw that Griswold was moved.

"I take it all back," he said. "I suppose the book-chicken has come home again to roost, and a returned manuscript accounts for anything. But seriously, Kenneth, you ought to get down to bed-rock facts. Nobody but a crazy phenomenon can find a publisher for his first book, nowadays, unless he has had some sort of an introduction in the magazines or the newspapers. You haven't had that; so far as I know, you haven't tried for it."

"Oh, yes, I have—tried and failed. It isn't in

me to do the salable thing, and there isn't a magazine editor in the country who doesn't know it by this time. They've been decent about it. Horton was kind enough. He covered two pages of a letter telling me why the stuff I sent from here might fit one of the reviews and why it wouldn't fit his magazine. But that is beside the mark. I tell you, Bainbridge, the conditions are all wrong when a man with a vital message to his kind can't get to deliver it to the people who want to hear it."

Bainbridge ordered the small coffees and found his cigar case.

"That is about what I suspected," he commented impatiently. "You couldn't keep your peculiar views muzzled even when you were writing a bit of a pot-boiler on sugar-planting. Which brings us back to the old contention: you drop your fool socialistic fad and write a book that a reputable publisher can bring out without committing commercial suicide, and you'll stand some show. Light up and fumigate that idea awhile."

Griswold took the proffered cigar half-absently, as he had taken the last piece of bread.

"It doesn't need fumigating; if I could consider it seriously it ought rather to be burnt with fire. You march in the ranks of the well-fed, Bainbridge, and it is your *métier* to be conservative. I don't, and it's mine to be radical."

"What would you have?" demanded the man on the conservative side of the table. "The world is as it is, and you can't remodel it."

"There is where you make the mistake common to those who cry Peace, when there is no peace," was the quick retort. "I, and my kind, can remodel it, and some day, when the burden has grown too heavy to be borne, we will. The aristocracy of rank, birth, feudal tyranny went down in fire and blood in France a century ago: the aristocracy of money will go down here, when the time is ripe."

"That is good anarchy, but mighty bad ethics. I didn't know you had reached that stage of the disease, Kenneth."

"Call it what you please; names don't change facts. Listen"—Griswold leaned upon the table; his eyes grew hard and the blue in them became metallic—"For more than a month I have tramped the streets of this cursed city begging—yes, that is the word—begging for work of any kind that would suffice to keep body and soul together; and for more than half of that time I have lived on one meal a day. That is what we have come to; we of the submerged majority. And that isn't all. The wage-worker himself, when he is fortunate enough to find a chance to earn his crust, is but a serf; a chattel among the other possessions of some fellow man who has acquired him in the plutocratic redistribution of the earth and the fulness thereof."

Bainbridge applauded in dumb show.

"Turn it loose and ease the soul-sickness, old man," he said indulgently. "I know things haven't been coming your way, lately. What is your remedy?"

Griswold was fairly started now, and ridicule was as fuel to the flame.

"The money-gatherers have set us the example. They have made us understand that might is right; that he who has may hold—if he can. The answer is simple: there is enough and to spare for all, and it belongs to all; to him who sows the seed and waters it, as well as to him who reaps the harvest. That is a violent remedy, you will say. So be it: it is the only one that will cure the epidemic of greed. There is an alternative, but it is only theoretical."

"And that?"

"It may be summed up in seven words: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' When the man who employs—and rules—uses the power that money gives him to succor his fellow man, the revolution will be indefinitely postponed. But as I say, it's only a theory."

Bainbridge glanced at his watch.

"I must be going," he said. "The *Adelantado* drops down the river at eleven. But in passing I'll venture a little prophecy. You're down on your luck now, and a bit hot-hearted in consequence; but some day you will strike it right and come out on top. When you do, you'll be a hard master; tattoo that on your arm somewhere so you'll be reminded of it."

Griswold had risen with his entertainer, and he put his hands on the table.

"God do so to me, and more, if I am, Bainbridge," he said soberly.

"That's all right: when the time comes, you just remember my little fortune-telling stunt. But before we shake hands, let's get back to concrete things for a minute or two. How are you fixed for the present, and what are you going to do for the future?"

Griswold's smile was not pleasant to look at.

"I am 'fixed' to run twenty-four hours longer, thanks to your hospitality. For that length of time I presume I shall continue to conform to what we have been taught to believe is the immutable order of things. After that——"

He paused, and Bainbridge put the question. "Well, after that; what then?"

"Then, if the chance to earn it is still denied me, and I am sufficiently hungry, I shall stretch forth my hand and take what I need."

Bainbridge fished in his pocket and took out a ten-dollar bank-note. "Do that first," he said, offering Griswold the money.

The proletary smiled and shook his head.

"No; not to keep from going hungry—not even to oblige you, Bainbridge. It is quite possible that I shall end by becoming a robber, as you paraphrasers would put it, but I sha'n't begin on my friends. Good-night, and a safe voyage to you."

II

SPINDRIFT

THE fruit steamer *Adelantado*, outward bound, was shuddering to the first slow revolutions of her propeller when Bainbridge turned the key in the door of the stuffy little state-room to which he had been directed, and went on deck.

The lines had been cast off and the ship was falling by imperceptible inches away from her broadside berth at the fruit wharf. Bainbridge heard the distance-softened clang of a gong; the tremulous murmur of the screw became more pronounced, and the vessel forged ahead until the current caught the outward-swinging prow. Five minutes later the *Adelantado* had circled majestically in mid-stream and was passing the lights of the city in review as she steamed at half-speed down the river.

Bainbridge had no mind to go back to the stuffy state-room, late as it was. Instead, he lighted a fresh cigar and found a chair on the port side aft where he could sit and watch the lights wheel past in orderly procession as the fruit steamer swept around the great crescent which gives New Orleans its unofficial name.

While the comfortable feeling of elation, born of his unexpected bit of good fortune, was still upper-

most to lend complacency to his reflections, he yet found room for a compassionate underthought having for its object the man from whom he had lately parted. He was honestly sorry for Griswold; sorry, but not actually apprehensive. He had known the defeated one in New York, and was not unused to his rebellious outbursts against the accepted order of things. Granting that his theories were incendiary and crudely subversive of all the civilized conventions, Griswold the man was nothing worse than an impressionable enthusiast; a victim of the auto-suggestion which seizes upon those who dwell too persistently upon the wrongs of the wronged.

So ran Bainbridge's epitomizing of the proletary's case; and he knew that his opinion was shared with complete unanimity by all who had known Griswold in Printing House Square. To a man they agreed in calling him Utopian, altruistic, visionary. What milder epithets should be applied to one who, with sufficient literary talent—not to say genius—to make himself a working name in the ordinary way, must needs run amuck among the theories and write a novel with a purpose? a novel, moreover, in which the purpose so overshadowed the story as to make the book a mere preachment.

As a matter of course, the publishers would have nothing to do with the book. Bainbridge remembered, with considerable satisfaction, that he had confidently predicted its failure, and had given Griswold plentiful good advice while it was in process of writing. But Griswold, being quite as obstinate as

he was impressionable, had refused to profit by the advice, and now the consequences of his stubbornness were upon him. He had said truly that his literary gift was novelistic and nothing else; and here he was, stranded and desperate, with the moribund book on his hands, and with no chance to write another even if he were so minded, since one can not write fasting.

Thus Bainbridge reflected, and was sorry that Griswold's invincible pride had kept him from accepting a friendly stop-gap in his extremity. Yet he smiled in spite of the regretful thought. It was amusing to figure Griswold, who, as long as his modest patrimony had lasted had been most emphatically a man not of the people, posing as an anarchist and up in arms against the well-to-do world. None the less, he was to be pitied.

"Poor beggar! he is in the doldrums just now, and it isn't quite fair to hold him responsible for what he says or thinks—or for what he thinks he thinks," said the reporter, letting the thought slip into speech. "Just the same, I wish I had made him take that ten-dollar bill. It might have— Why, hello, Broffin! How are you, old man? Where the dickens did you drop from?"

It was the inevitable steamer acquaintance who is always at hand to prove the trite narrowness of the world, and Bainbridge kicked a chair into comradely place for him.

Broffin, heavy-browed and clean-shaven save for a thick mustache that hid the hard-bitted mouth, replaced the chair to suit himself and sat down. In

appearance he was a cross between a steamboat captain on a vacation, and an up-river plantation overseer recovering from his annual pleasure trip to the city. But his reply to Bainbridge's query proved that he was neither.

"I didn't drop; I walked. More than that, I kept step with you all the way from Chaudière's to the levee. You'd be dead easy game for an amateur."

"You'll get yourself disliked, the first thing you know," said Bainbridge, laughing. "Can't you ever forget that you are in the man-hunting business?"

"Yes; just as often, and for just as long, as you can forget that you are in the news-hunting business."

"Tally!" said Bainbridge, and he laughed again. After which they sat in silence until the *Adelantado* doubled the bend in the great river and the last outposts of the city's lights disappeared, leaving only a softened glow in the upper air to temper the velvety blackness of the April night. The steamer had passed Chalmette when Broffin said:

"Speaking of Chaudière's reminds me: who was that fellow you were telling good-by as you came out of the café? His face was as familiar as a ship's figure-head, but I couldn't place him."

The question coupled in automatically with the reporter's train of thought; hence he answered it rather more fully and freely than he might have at another time and under other conditions. From establishing Griswold's identity for his fellow passenger, he slipped by easy stages into the story of the

proletary's ups and downs, climaxing it with a vivid little word-painting of the farewell supper at Chaudière's.

"To hear him talk, you would size him up for a bloody-minded nihilist of the thirty-third degree, ready and honing to sweep the existing order of things into the farthest hence," he added. "But in reality he is one of the finest fellows in the world, gone a fraction morbid over the economic side of the social problem. He has a heart of gold, as I happen to know. He used to spend a good bit of his time in the backwater, and you know what the backwater of a big city will do to a man."

"I couldn't hold my job if I didn't," was the reply.

"That means that you know only half of it," Bainbridge asserted with cheerful dogmatism. "You're thinking of the crooks it turns out, 'which it is your nature to.' But Griswold wasn't looking for the crooks; he was eternally and everlastingly breaking his heart over the sodden miseries. One night he stumbled into a cellar somewhere down in the East Side lower levels, looking for a fellow he had been trying to find work for; a crippled 'longshoreman. When he got into the place he found the man stiff and cold, the woman with the death rattle in her throat, and a two-year-old baby creeping back and forth between the dead father and the dying mother —starvation, you know, straight from the shoulder. They say it doesn't happen; but it does."

"Of course it does!" growled the listener. "*I* know."

"We all know; and most of us drop a little something into the hat and pass on. But Griswold isn't built that way. He jumped into the breach like a man and tried to save the mother. It was too late, and when the woman died he took the child to his own eight-by-ten attic and nursed and fed it until the missionary people took it off his hands. He did that, mind you, when he was living on two meals a day, himself; and I'm putting it up that he went shy on one of them to buy milk for that kid."

"Holy Smoke!—and he calls himself an anarchist?" was the gruff comment. "It's a howling pity there ain't a lot more just like him—what?"

"That is what I say," Bainbridge agreed. Then, with a sudden twinge of remorse for having told Griswold's story to a stranger, he changed the subject with an abrupt question.

"Where are you headed for, Broffin?"

The man who might have passed for a steamboat captain or a plantation overseer, and was neither, chuckled dryly.

"You don't expect me to give it away to you, and you a newspaper man, do you? But I will—seeing you can't get it on the wires. I'm going down to Guatemala after Mortsen."

"The Crescent Bank defaulter? By Jove! you've found him at last, have you?"

The detective nodded. "It takes a good while, sometimes, but I don't fall down very often when there's enough money in it to make the game worth the candle. I've been two years, off and on, trying

to locate Mortsen: and now that I've found him, he is where he can't be extradited. All the same, I'll bet you five to one he goes back with me in the next steamer—what? Have a new smoke. No? Then let's go and turn in; it's getting late in the night."

III

THE RIGHT OF MIGHT

Two days after the supper at Chaudière's and the clearing of the fruit steamer *Adelantado* for the banana coast, or, more specifically, in the forenoon of the second day, the unimpetuous routine of the business quarter of New Orleans was rudely disturbed by the shock of a genuine sensation.

To shatter at a single blow the most venerable of the routine precedents, the sensational thing chose for its colliding point with orderly system one of the oldest and most conservative of the city's banks: the Bayou State Security. At ten o'clock, following the precise habit of half a lifetime, Mr. Andrew Galbraith, president of the Bayou State, entered his private room in the rear of the main banking apartment, opened his desk, and addressed himself to the business of the day. Punctually at ten-five, the stenographer, whose desk was in the anteroom, brought in the mail; five minutes later the cashier entered for his morning conference with his superior; and at half-past the hour the president was left alone to read his correspondence.

Being a man whose mental processes were all serious, and whose hobby was method, Mr. Galbraith had established a custom of giving himself a

quiet half-hour of inviolable seclusion in which to read and consider his mail. During this sacred interval the stenographer, standing guard in the outer office, had instructions to deny his chief to callers of any and every degree. Wherefore, when, at twenty minutes to eleven, the door of the private office opened to admit a stranger, the president was justly annoyed.

"Well, sir; what now?" he demanded, impatiently, taking the intruder's measure in a swift glance shot from beneath his bushy white eyebrows.

The unannounced visitor was a young man of rather prepossessing appearance, a trifle tall for his breadth of shoulder, fair, with blue eyes and a curling reddish beard and mustache, the former trimmed to a point. So much the president was able to note in the appraisive glance—and to remember afterward.

The caller made no reply to the curt question. He had turned and was closing the door. There was a quiet insistence in the act that was like the flick of a whip to Mr. Galbraith's irritation.

"If you have business with me, you'll have to excuse me for a few minutes," he protested, still more impatiently. "Be good enough to take a seat in the anteroom until I ring. MacFarland should have told you."

The young man drew up a chair and sat down, ignoring the request as if he had failed to hear it. Ordinarily Mr. Andrew Galbraith's temper was equable enough; the age-cooled temper of a methodical gentleman whose long upper lip was in

itself an advertisement of self-control. But such a deliberate infraction of his rules, coupled with the stony impudence of the visitor, made him spring up angrily to ring for the watchman.

The intruder was too quick for him. When his hand sought the bell-push he found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver, and so was fain to fall back into his chair, gasping.

"Ah-h-h!" he stammered. And when the words could be managed: "So that's it, is it?—you're a robber!"

"No," said the invader of the presidential privacies calmly, speaking for the first time since his incoming. "I am not a robber, save in your own very limited definition of the word. I am merely a poor man, Mr. Galbraith—one of the uncounted thousands—and I want money. If you call for help, I shall shoot you."

"You—you'd murder me?" The president's large-jointed hands were clutching the arms of the pivot-chair, and he was fighting manfully for courage and presence of mind to cope with the terrifying emergency.

"Not willingly, I assure you: I have as great a regard for human life as you have—but no more. You would kill me this moment in self-defence, if you could: I shall most certainly kill you if you attempt to give an alarm. On the other hand, if you prove reasonable and obedient your life is not in danger. It is merely a question of money, and if you are amenable to reason——"

"If I'm—but I'm not amenable to your reasons!" blustered the president, recovering a little from the first shock of terrified astoundment. "I refuse to listen to them. I'll not have anything to do with you. Go away!"

The young man's smile showed his teeth, but it also proved that he was not wholly devoid of the sense of humor.

"Keep your temper, Mr. Galbraith," he advised coolly. "The moment is mine, and I say you shall listen first and obey afterward. Otherwise you die. Which is it to be? Choose quickly—time is precious."

The president yielded the first point, that of the receptive ear; but grudgingly and as one under strict compulsion.

"Well, well, then; out with it. What have you to say for yourself?"

"This: You are rich: you represent the existing order of things. I am poor, and I stand for my necessity, which is higher than any man-made law or custom. You have more money than you can possibly use in any legitimate personal channels: I have not the price of the next meal, already twenty-four hours overdue. I came here this morning with my life in my hand to invite you to share with me a portion of that which is yours chiefly by the right of possession. If you do it, well and good: if not, there will be a new president of the Bayou State Security. Do I make myself sufficiently explicit?"

Andrew Galbraith glanced furtively at the paper-

weight clock on his desk. It was nearly eleven, and MacFarland would surely come in on the stroke of the hour. If he could only fend off the catastrophe for a few minutes, until help should come. He searched in his pockets and drew forth a handful of coins.

"You say you are hungry: I'm na that well off that I canna remember the time when I knew what it was to be on short commons, mysel'," he said; and the unconscious lapse into the mother idiom was a measure of his perturbation. "Take this, now, and be off wi' you, and we'll say no more about it."

The invader of privacies glanced at the clock in his turn and shook his head.

"You are merely trying to gain time, and you know it, Mr. Galbraith. My stake in this game is much more than a handful of charity silver; and I don't do you the injustice to believe that you hold your life so cheaply; you who have so much money and, at best, so few years to live."

The president put the little heap of coins on the desk, but he did not abandon the struggle for delay.

"What's your price, then?" he demanded, as one who may possibly consider a compromise.

"One hundred thousand dollars—in cash."

"But man! ye're clean daft! Do ye think I have——"

"I am not here to argue," was the incisive interruption. "Take your pen and fill out a check payable to your own order for one hundred thousand

dollars, and do it now. If that door opens before we have concluded, you are a dead man!"

At this Andrew Galbraith saw that the end was nigh and gathered himself for a final effort at time-killing. It was absurd; he had no such balance to his personal credit; such a check would not be honored; it would be an overdraft, and the teller would very properly— In the midst of his vehement protests the stranger sprang out of his chair, stepped back a pace and raised his weapon.

"Mr. Galbraith, you are juggling with your life! Write that check while there is yet time!"

A sound of subdued voices came from the anteroom, and the beleaguered old man stole a swift upward glance at the face of his persecutor. There was no mercy in the fierce blue eyes glaring down upon him; neither compassion nor compunction, but rather madness and fell murder. The summons came once again.

"Do it quickly, I say, before we are interrupted. Do you hear?"

Truly, the president both heard and understood; yet he hesitated one other second.

"You will not? Then may God have mercy——"

The hammer of the levelled pistol clicked. Andrew Galbraith shut his eyes and made a blind grasp for pen and check-book. His hands were shaking as with a palsy, but the fear of death steadied them suddenly when he came to write.

"Indorse it!" was the next command. The voices had ceased beyond the partition, and the dead

silence was relieved only by the labored strokes of the president's pen and the tap-tap of the typewriter in the adjacent anteroom.

The check was written and indorsed, and under the menace of the revolver Andrew Galbraith was trying to give it to the robber. But the robber would not take it.

"No, I don't want your paper: come with me to your paying teller and get me the money. Make what explanation you see fit; but remember—if he hesitates, you die."

They left the private office together, the younger man a short half-step in the rear, with his pistol-bearing hand thrust under his coat. MacFarland, the stenographer, was at his desk in the corner of the anteroom. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the unwonted thing, the president's forthfaring with a stranger who had somehow gained access to the private room during the sacred half-hour, would have made him look up and wonder. But this was the hundredth time, and Andrew Galbraith's anxious glance aside was wasted upon MacFarland's back.

Still the president did not despair. In the public lobby there would be more eyes to see, and perhaps some that would understand. Mr. Galbraith took a firmer hold upon his self-possession and trusted that some happy chance might yet intervene to save him.

But chance did not intervene. There was a goodly number of customers in the public space, but not one of the half-dozen or more who nodded to the

president or passed the time of day with him saw the eye-appeal which was the only one he dared to make. On the short walk around to the paying teller's window, the robber kept even step with his victim, and try as he would, Andrew Galbraith could not summon the courage to forget the pistol muzzle menacing him in its coat-covered ambush.

At the paying wicket there was only one customer, instead of the group the president had hoped to find; a sweet-faced young woman in a modest travelling hat and a gray coat. She was getting a draft cashed, and when she saw them she would have stood aside. It was the robber who anticipated her intention and forbade it with a courteous gesture; whereat she turned again to the window to conclude her small transaction with the teller.

The few moments which followed were terribly trying ones for the gray-haired president of the Bayou State Security. None the less, his brain was busy with the chanceful possibilities. Failing all else, he was determined to give the teller a warning signal, come what might. It was a duty owed to society no less than to the bank and to himself. But on the pinnacle of resolution, at the instant when, with the robber at his elbow, he stepped to the window and presented the check, Andrew Galbraith felt the gentle pressure of the pistol muzzle against his side; nay, more; he fancied he could feel the cold chill of the metal strike through and through him.

So it came about that the fine resolution had quite evaporated when he said, with what composure there

was in him: "You'll please give me currency for that, Johnson."

The teller glanced at the check and then at his superior; not too inquisitively, since it was not his business to question the president's commands.

"How will you have it?" he asked; and it was the stranger at Mr. Galbraith's elbow who answered.

"One thousand in fives, tens, and twenties, loose, if you please; the remainder in the largest denominations, put up in a package."

The teller counted out the one thousand in small notes quickly; but he had to leave the cage and go to the vault for the huge remainder. This was the crucial moment of peril for the robber, and the president, stealing a glance at the face of his persecutor, saw the blue eyes blazing with excitement.

"It is your time to pray, Mr. Galbraith," said the spoiler in low tones. "If you have given your man the signal——"

But the signal had not been given. The teller was re-entering the cage with the bulky packet of money-paper.

"You needn't open it," said the young man at the president's elbow. "The bank's count is good enough for me." And when the window wicket had been unlatched and the money passed out, he stuffed the loose bills carelessly into his pocket, put the package containing the ninety-nine thousand dollars under his arm, nodded to the president, backed swiftly to the street door and vanished.

Then it was that Mr. Andrew Galbraith sud-

denly found speech, opening his thin lips and pouring forth a torrent of incoherence which presently got itself translated into a vengeful hue and cry; and New Orleans the unimpetuous had its sensation ready-made.

IV

IO TRIUMPHE!

If Kenneth Griswold, backing out of the street door of the Bayou State Security and vanishing with his booty, had been nothing more than a professional "strong-arm man," he would probably have been taken and jailed within the hour, if only for the reason that his desperate cast for fortune included no well-wrought-out plan of escape. But since he was at once both wiser and less cunning than the practised bank robber, he threw his pursuers off the scent by an expedient in which artlessness and daring quite beyond the gifts of the journeyman criminal played equal parts.

Once safely in the street, with a thousand dollars in his pocket and the packet of bank-notes under his arm, he was seized by an impulse to do some extravagant thing to celebrate his success. It had proved to be such a simple matter, after all: one bold stroke; a tussle, happily bloodless, with the plutocratic dragon whose hold upon his treasure was so easily broken; and presto! the hungry proletary had become himself a power in the world, strong to do good or evil, as the gods might direct.

This was the prompting to exultation as it might have been set in words; but in Griswold's thought it was but a swift suggestion, followed instantly by

another which was much more to the immediate purpose. He was hungry: there was a restaurant next door to the bank. Without thinking overmuch of the risk he ran, and perhaps not at all of the audacious subtlety of such an expedient at such a critical moment, he went in, sat down at one of the small marble-topped tables, and calmly ordered breakfast.

Since hunger is a lusty special pleader, making itself heard above any pulpit drum of the higher faculties, it is quite probable that Griswold dwelt less upon what he had done than upon what he was about to eat, until the hue and cry in the street reminded him that the chase was begun. But at this, not to appear suspiciously incurious, he put on the mask of indifferent interest and asked the waiter concerning the uproar.

The serving man did not know what had happened, but he would go and find out, if M'sieu' so desired. "M'sieu'" said breakfast first, by all means, and information afterward. Both came in due season; and the hungry one ate while he listened.

Transmuted into the broken English of the Gascon serving man, the story of the robbery lost nothing in its sensational features.

"Ah! w'at you t'ink, M'sieu'? De bank on de nex' do' is been rob'!" And upon this theme excited volubility descanted at large. The bank had been surrounded by a gang of desperate men, with every exit guarded, while the leader, a masked giant armed to the teeth, had compelled the president at the

muzzle of a pistol to pay a ransom of fifty—one hundred—five hundred thousand dollars! With the money in hand the gang had vanished, the masked giant firing the pistol at M'sieu' the president as he went. Cross-examined, the waiter could not affirm positively as to the shot. But as for the remaining details there could be no doubt.

Griswold ordered a second cup of coffee, and while the waiter was bringing it, conscience—not the newly acquired conscience, but the conventional—bent its bow and sped its final arrow. It was suddenly brought home to the enthusiast with sharp emphasis that to all civilized mankind, save and excepting those few chosen ones who shared his peculiar convictions, he was a common thief, a bandit, an outlaw. Public opinion, potential or expressed, is at best but an intangible thing. But for a few tumultuous seconds Griswold writhed under the ban of it as if it had been a whip of scorpions. Then he smiled to think how strong the bonds of custom had grown; and at the smile conscience flung away its empty quiver.

Now it was over, however, the enthusiast was rather grateful for the chastening. It served to remind him afresh of his mission. This money which he had just wrested from the claws of the plutocratic dragon must be held as a sacred trust; it must be devoted scrupulously to the cause of the down-trodden and the oppressed. Precisely how it was to be applied he had not yet determined; but that could be decided later.

Meanwhile, it was very evident that the dragon did not intend to accept defeat without a struggle, and Griswold set his wits at work upon the problem of escape.

"It's a little queer that I hadn't thought of that part of it before," he mused, sipping his coffee as one who need not hasten until the race is actually begun. "I suppose the other fellow, the real robber, would have figured himself safely out of it—or would have thought he had—before he made the break. Since I did not, I've got it to do now, and there isn't much time to throw away. Let me see—" he shut his eyes and went into the inventive trance of the literary craftsman—"the keynote must be originality; I must do that which the other fellow would never think of doing."

On the strength of that decision he ventured to order a third cup of coffee, and before it had cooled he had outlined a plan, basing it upon a further cross-questioning of the Gascon waiter. The man had been to the street door again, and by this time the sidewalk excitement had subsided sufficiently to make room for an approach to the truth. The story of an armed band surrounding the bank had been a canard. There had been but one man concerned in the robbery, and the sidewalk gossip was beginning to describe him with discomforting accuracy.

Griswold paid his score and went out boldly and with studied nonchalance. He reasoned that, notwithstanding the growing accuracy of the street re-

port, he was still in no immediate danger so long as he remained in such close proximity to the bank. It was safe to assume that this was one of the things the professional "strong-arm man" would not do. But it was also evident that he must speedily lose his identity if he hoped to escape; and the lost identity must leave no clew to itself.

Griswold smiled when he remembered how, in fiction of the felon-catching sort, and in real life, for that matter, the law-breaker always did leave a clew for the pursuers. Thereupon arose a determination to demonstrate practically that it was quite as possible to create an inerrant fugitive as to conceive an infallible detective. Joining the passers-by on the sidewalk, he made his way leisurely to Canal Street, and thence diagonally through the old French quarter toward the French Market. In a narrow alley giving upon the levee he finally found what he was looking for; a dingy sailors' barber's shop. The barber was a negro, fat, unctuous and sleepy-looking; and he was alone.

"Yes, sah; shave, boss?" asked the negro, bowing and scraping a foot when Griswold entered.

"No; a hair-cut." The customer produced a silver half-dollar. "Go somewhere and get me a cigar to smoke while you are doing it. Get a good one, if you have to go to Canal Street," he added, climbing into the rickety chair.

The fat negro shuffled out, scenting tips. The moment he was out of sight, Griswold took up the scissors and began to hack awkwardly at his beard

and mustache; awkwardly, but swiftly and with well-considered purpose. The result was a fairly complete metamorphosis easily wrought. In place of the trim beard and curling mustache there was a rough stubble, stiff and uneven, like that on the face of a man who had neglected to shave for a week or two.

"There, I think that will answer," he told himself, standing back before the cracked looking-glass to get the general effect. "And it is decently original. The professional cracksman would probably have shaved, whereupon the first amateur detective he met would reconstruct the beard on the sunburned lines. Now for a pawnbroker; and the more avaricious he happens to be, the better he will serve the purpose."

He went to the door and looked up and down the alley. The negro was not yet in sight, and Griswold walked rapidly away in the direction opposite to that taken by the obliging barber.

A pawnbroker's shop of the kind required was not far to seek in that locality, and when it was found, Griswold drove a hard bargain with the Portuguese Jew behind the counter. The pledge he offered was the suit he was wearing, and the bargaining concluded in an exchange of the still serviceable business suit for a pair of butternut trousers, a second-hand coat too short in the sleeves, a flannel shirt, a cap, and a red handkerchief; these and a sum of ready money, the smallness of which he deplored piteously before he would consent to accept it.

The effect of the haggling was exactly what Griswold had prefigured. The Portuguese, most suspicious of his tribe, suspecting everything but the truth, flatly accused his customer of having stolen the pledge. And when Griswold departed without denying the charge, suspicion became conviction, and the pledged clothing, which might otherwise have given the police the needed clew, was carefully hidden away against a time when the Jew's apprehensions should be quieted.

Having thus disguised himself, Griswold made the transformation artistically complete by walking a few squares in the dust of a loaded cotton float on the levee. Then he made a tramp's bundle of the manuscript of the moribund book, the pistol, and the money in the red handkerchief; and having surveyed himself with some satisfaction in the bar mirror of a riverside pot-house, a daring impulse to test his disguise by going back to the restaurant where he had breakfasted seized and bore him uptown.

The experiment was an unqualified success. The proprietor of the bank-neighboring café not only failed to recognize him; he was driven forth with revilings in idiomatic French and broken English.

"*Bête!* Go back on da levee w'ere you belong to go. I'll been kipping dis café for zhentlemen! *Scélérat!* Go!"

Griswold went out, smiling between his teeth.

"That settles the question of identification and present safety," he assured himself exultantly.

Then: "I believe I could walk into the Bayou State Security and not be recognized."

As before, the daring impulse was irresistible, and he gave place to it on the spur of the moment. Fouling a five-dollar bill in the mud of the gutter, he went boldly into the bank and asked the paying teller to give him silver for it. The teller sniffed at the money, scowled at the man, and turned back to his cash-book without a word. Griswold's smile grew to an inward laugh when he reached the street.

"The dragon may have teeth and claws, but it can neither see nor smell," he said, contemptuously, turning his steps riverward again. "Now I have only to choose my route and go in peace. How and where are the only remaining questions to be answered."

V

THE *BELLE JULIE*

For an hour or more after his return to the river front, Griswold idled up and down the levee; and the end of the interval found him still undecided as to the manner and direction of his flight—to say nothing of the choice of a destination, which was even more evasive than the other and more immediately pressing decision.

It was somewhere in the midst of the reflective hour that the elate triumph of success began to give place to the inevitable reaction. The partition which stands upon the narrow dividing line between vagrancy and crime is but a paper wall, and any hot-hearted insurrectionary may break through it at will. But to accept the conditions of vagrancy one must first embrace the loathsome thing itself. Griswold remembered the glimpse he had had of himself in the bar mirror of the pot-house, and the chains of his transformed identity began to gall him. It was to little purpose that he girded at his compunctions, telling himself that he was only playing a necessary part; that one needs must when the devil drives. Custom, habit, convention, or whatever it may be which differentiates between the law-abiding and the lawless, would have its say; and from railing

bitterly against the social conditions which made his act at once a necessity and a crime, he began to feel a prickling disgust for the subterfuges to which the crime had driven him.

Moreover, there was a growing fear that he might not always be able to play consistently the double rôle whose lines were already becoming intricate and confusing. To be true to his ideals, he must continue to be in utter sincerity Griswold the brother-loving. That said itself. But on the other hand, to escape the consequences of his act, he must hold himself in instant readiness to be in savage earnest what a common thief would be in similar straits; a thing of duplicity and double meanings and ferocity, alert to turn and slay at any moment in the battle of self-preservation.

He had thought that the supreme crisis was passed when, earlier in the day, he had pawned the last of his keepsakes for the money to buy the revolver. But he had yet to learn that there is no supreme crisis in the human span, save that which ends it; that all the wayfaring duels with fate are inconclusive; conflicts critical enough at the moment, but lacking finality, and likely to be renewed indefinitely if one lives beyond them.

He was confronting another of the false climaxes in the hour of aimless wanderings on the river front. More than once he was tempted to buy back his lost identity at any price. Never before had he realized what a precious possession is the fearlessness of innocency; weighed against it, the thick packet

of bank-notes in the tramp's bundle, and all that it might stand for, were as air-blown bubbles to refined gold. Yet he would not go back; he could not go back. To restore the money would be more than a confession of failure; it would be an abject recantation—a flat denial of every article of his latest social creed, and a plunge into primordial chaos in the matter of theories, out of which he could emerge only as a criminal in fact.

When the conflict of indetermination became altogether insupportable, he put it aside with the resolution which was the strong thread in the loosely twisted warp of his character and forced himself to think concretely toward a solution of the problem of flight. The possession of the money made all things possible—in any field save the theoretical—and the choice of dwelling or hiding-places seemed infinite.

His first thought had been to go back to New York. But there the risk of detection would be greater than elsewhere, and he decided that there was no good reason why he should incur it. Besides, he argued, there were other fields in which the sociological studies could be pursued under conditions more favorable than those to be found in a great city. In his mind's eye he saw himself domiciled in some thriving interior town, working and studying among people who were not unindividualized by an artificial environment. In such a community theory and practice might go hand in hand; he could know and be known; and the money at his command

would be vastly more of a moulding and controlling influence than it could possibly be in the smallest of circles in New York. The picture, struck out upon the instant, pleased him, and having sufficiently idealized it, he adopted it enthusiastically as an inspiration, leaving the mere geographical detail to arrange itself as chance, or subsequent events, might determine.

That part of the problem disposed of, there yet remained the choice of a line of flight; and it was a small thing that finally decided the manner of his going. For the third time in the hour of aimless wanderings he found himself loitering opposite the berth of the *Belle Julie*, an up-river steamboat whose bell gave sonorous warning of the approaching moment of departure. Toiling roustabouts, trailing in and out like an endless procession of human ants, were hurrying the last of the cargo aboard. Griswold stood to look on. The toilers were negroes, most of them, but with here and there among the blacks and yellows a paler face so begrimed with sweat and dust as to be scarcely distinguishable from the majority. The sight moved Griswold, as thankless toil always did; and he fell to contrasting the hard lot of the laborers with that of the group of passengers looking on idly from the comfortable shade of the saloon-deck awning. Griswold's thought vocalized itself in compassionate musings.

"Poor devils! They've been told that they are freemen, and perhaps they believe it. But surely no slave of the Toulon galleys was ever in bitterer

bondage. . . . Free?—yes, free to toil and sweat, to bear burdens and to be driven like cattle under the yoke! Oh, good Lord!—look at that!"

The ant procession had attacked the final tier of boxes in the lading, and one of the burden-bearers, a white man, had stumbled and fallen like a crushed pack-animal under a load too heavy for him. Griswold was beside him in a moment. The man could not rise, and Griswold dragged him not untenderly out of the way of the others.

"Why didn't you stand from under and let it drop?" he demanded gruffly, as an offset to the womanish tenderness; but when the man gasped for breath and groaned, he took another tone: "Where are you hurt?"

The crushed one sat up and spat blood.

"I don't know: inside, somewheres. I been dyin' on my feet any time for a year or two back."

"Consumption?" queried Griswold, briefly.

"I reckon so."

"Then you have no earthly business in a deck crew. Don't you know that?"

The man's smile was a ghastly face-wrinkling.

"Reckon I hain't got any business anywheres—out'n a horspital or a hole in the ground. But I kind o' thought I'd like to be planted 'longside the woman and the childer, if I could make out some way to git there."

"Where?"

The consumptive named a small river town in Iowa.

"And you were going to work your passage on the boat?"

"I was allowin' to try for it. But I reckon I'm done up, now."

In Griswold impulse was the dominant chord always struck by an appeal to his sympathies. His compassion went straight to the mark, as it was sure to do when his pockets were not empty.

"What is the fare by rail to your town?" he inquired.

"I don't know: I never asked. Somewheres between twenty and thirty dollars, I reckon; and that's more money than I've seen sence the woman died."

Griswold hastily counted out a hundred dollars from his pocket fund and thrust the money into the man's hand.

"Take that and change places with me," he commanded, slipping on the mask of gruffness again. "Pay your fare on the train, and I'll take your job on the boat. Don't be a fool!" he added, when the man put his face in his hands and began to choke. "It's a fair enough exchange, and I'll get as much out of it one way as you will the other. What is your name? I may have to borrow it."

"Gavitt—John Wesley Gavitt."

"All right; off with you," said the liberator, curtly; and with that he shouldered the sick man's load and fell into line in the ant procession.

Once on board the steamer, he followed his file-leader aft and made it his first care to find a safe

hiding-place for the tramp's bundle in the knotted handkerchief. That done, he stepped into the line again, and became the sick man's substitute in fact.

Inured to hard living as he was, the substitute roustabout had made no more than a half-dozen rounds between the levee and the cargo-deck of the *Belle Julie* before he was glad to note that the steamer's lading was all but completed. It was toil of the shrewdest, and he drew breath of blessed relief when the last man staggered up the plank with his burden. The bell was clanging its final summons, and the slowly revolving paddle-wheels were taking the strain from the mooring lines. Being near the bow line Griswold was one of the two who sprang ashore at the mate's bidding to cast off. He was backing the hawser out of the last of its half-hitches when a carriage was driven rapidly down to the stage and two tardy passengers hurried aboard. The mate bawled from his station on the hurricane-deck.

"Now, then! Take a turn on that spring line out there and get them trunks aboard! Lively!"

The larger of the two trunks fell to the late recruit; and when he had set it down at the door of the designated state-room, he did half-absently what John Gavitt might have done without blame: read the tacked-on card, which bore the owner's name and address, written in a firm round hand: "Charlotte Farnham, Wahaska, Minnesota."

"Thank you," said a musical voice at his elbow. "May I trouble you to put it inside?"

Griswold wheeled as if the mild-toned request had been a blow, and was properly ashamed. But when he saw the speaker, consternation promptly slew all the other emotions. For the owner of the tagged trunk was the young woman to whom, an hour or so earlier, he had given place at the paying teller's wicket in the Bayou State Security.

She saw his confusion, charged it to the card-reading at which she had surprised him, and smiled. Then he met her gaze fairly and became sane again when he was assured that she did not recognize him: became sane, and whipped off his cap, and dragged the trunk into the state-room. After which he went to his place on the lower deck with a great thankfulness throbbing in his heart and an inchoate resolve shaping itself in his brain.

Late that night, when the *Belle Julie* was well on her way up the great river, he flung himself down upon the sacked coffee on the engine-room guard to snatch a little rest between landings, and the resolve became sufficiently cosmic to formulate itself in words.

"I'll call it an oracle," he mused. "One place is as good as another, just so it is inconsequent enough. And I am sure I've never heard of Wahaska."

Now Griswold the social rebel was, before all things else, Griswold the imaginative literary craftsman; and no sooner was the question of his ultimate destination settled thus arbitrarily than he began to prefigure the place and its probable lacks and havings. This process brought him by easy stages to pleasant

idealizings of Miss Charlotte Farnham, who was, thus far, the only tangible thing connected with the destination-dream. A little farther along her personality laid hold of him and the idealizings became purely literary.

"She is a magnificently strong type!" was his summing up of her, made while he was lying flat on his back and staring absently at the flitting shadows among the deck beams overhead. "Her face is as readable as only the face of a woman instinctively good and pure in heart can be. Any man who can put her between the covers of a book may put anything else he pleases in it and snap his fingers at the world. If I am going to live in the same town with her, I ought to jot her down on paper before I lose the keen edge of the first impression."

He considered it for a moment, and then got up and went in search of a pencil and a scrap of paper. The dozing night clerk gave him both, with a sleepy malediction thrown in; and he went back to the engine-room and scribbled his word-picture by the light of the swinging incandescent.

"Character-study: Young woman of the type Western Creole; not the daughter of aliens, but born in the West, of parents who have migrated from one of the older States. (I'll hazard that much as a guess.)

"*Detail:* Titian blonde, with hair like spun bronze; the complexion which neither freckles nor tans; cool gray eyes with underdepths in them that no

man but her lover may ever quite fathom; a figure which would be statuesque if it were not altogether human and womanly; features cast in the Puritan mould, with the lines of character well emphasized; lips that would be passionate but for—no, lips that *will* be passionate when the hour and the man arrive. A soul strong in the strength of transparent purity, which would send her to the stake for a principle, or to the Isle of Lepers with her lover. A typical heroine for a story in which the hero is a man who might need to borrow a conscience."

He read it over thoughtfully when it was finished, changing a word here and a phrase there with a craftsman's fidelity to the exactnesses. Then he shook his head regretfully and tore the scrap of paper into tiny squares, scattering them upon the brown flood surging past the engine-room gangway.

"It won't do," he confessed reluctantly, as one who sacrifices good literary material to a stern sense of the fitness of things. "It is nothing less than a cold-blooded sacrilege. I can't make copy of her if I write no more while the world stands."

VI

THE DECK-HAND

CHARLOTTE FARNHAM'S friends—their number was the number of those who had seen her grow from childhood to maiden—and womanhood—commonly identified her for inquiring strangers as "good old Doctor Bertie's 'only,'" adding, men and women alike, that she was as well-balanced and sensible as she was good to look upon.

As Griswold had guessed, she stood but a single remove from an American lineage much older than the America of the Middle West. Her father had been a country physician in New Hampshire, migrating to the dry winters of Minnesota for his young wife's health. The migration had been too long postponed to save the mother's life; but it had made a beautiful woman of the daughter, dowering her with the luxuriant physical charm which is the proof that transplantation to fresher soil is not less beneficial to human- than to plant-kind.

She had been spending the winter at Pass Christian with her aunt, who was an invalid; and it was for the invalid's sake that she had decided to make the return journey by river. Patient little Miss Gilman was the least querulous of sufferers, but she was

always very ill on a railway train. Hence Charlotte, who was at once physician, nurse, mentor, and dutiful kinswoman to the frail little lady who looked old enough to be her grandmother, had chosen the longer, but less trying, route to the far North.

So it had come about that their state-rooms had been taken on the *Belle Julie;* and on the morning of the second day out from New Orleans, Miss Gilman was so far from being travel-sick that she was able to sit with Charlotte in the shade of the hurricane-deck aft, and to enjoy, with what quavering enthusiasm there was in her, the matchless scenery of the lower Mississippi.

At Baton Rouge the New Orleans papers came aboard, and Miss Farnham bought a copy of the *Louisianian.* As a matter of course, the first-page leader was a circumstantial account of the daring robbery of the Bayou State Security, garnished with startling head-lines. Charlotte read it, half-absently at first, and a second time with interest awakened and a quickening of the pulse when she realized that she had actually been a witness of the final act in the near-tragedy. Her little gasp of belated horror brought a query from the invalid.

"What is it, Charlie, dear?"

For answer, Charlotte read the newspaper story of the robbery, head-lines and all.

"For pity's sake! in broad daylight! How shockingly bold!" commented Miss Gilman.

"Yes; but that wasn't what made me gasp. The paper says: 'A young lady was at the teller's window

when the robber came up with Mr. Galbraith—' Aunt Fanny, *I* was the 'young lady'!"

"You? horrors!" ejaculated the invalid, holding up wasted hands of deprecation. "To think of it! Why, child, if anything had happened, a terrible murder might have been committed right there before your very face and eyes! Dear, dear; whatever are we coming to!"

Charlotte the well-balanced, smiled at the purely personal limitations of her aunt's point of view.

"It is very dreadful, of course; but it is no worse just because I happened to be there. Yet it seems ridiculously incredible. I can hardly believe it, even now."

"Incredible? How?"

"Why, there wasn't anything about it to suggest a robbery. Now that I know, I remember that the old gentleman did seem anxious or worried, or at least, not quite comfortable some way; but the young man was smiling pleasantly, and he looked like anything rather than a desperate criminal. I can close my eyes and see him, just as I saw him yesterday. He had a good face, Aunt Fanny; it was the face of a man whom one would trust almost instinctively."

Miss Gilman's New England conservatism, unweakened by her long residence in the West, took the alarm at once.

"Did you notice him particularly, Charlotte? Would you recognize him if you should see him again?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes; I am quite sure I should."

"But no one in the bank knew you. They couldn't trace you by your father's draft and letter of identification, could they?"

Charlotte was mystified. "I should suppose they could, if they wanted to. But why? What if they could?"

"My dear child; don't you see? They are sure to catch the robber, sooner or later, and if they know how to find you, you might be dragged into court as a witness!"

Miss Farnham was not less averse to publicity than the conventionalities demanded, but she had, or believed she had, very clear and well-defined ideas of her own touching her duty in any matter involving a plain question of right and wrong.

"I shouldn't wait to be dragged," she asserted quietly. "It would be a simple duty to go willingly. The first thing I thought of was that I ought to write at once to Mr. Galbraith, giving him my address."

Thereupon issued discussion. Miss Gilman's opinion upon such a momentous question—a question involving an apparent conflict between the proprieties and an act of simple justice—leaned heavily toward silence. There could be no possible need for Charlotte's interference. Mr. Galbraith and the teller would be able to identify the robber, and a thousand eye-witnesses could do no more. At the end of the argument the conservative one had extorted a conditional promise from her niece. The matter

should remain in abeyance until the question of conscientious obligation had been submitted to Charlotte's father and decided by him.

Being by nature and inclination averse to shacklings, verbal or other, Charlotte gave the promise reluctantly, and the subject was dismissed. Not from the younger woman's thoughts, however. In the reflective field the scene in the bank recurred again and again until presently it became a haunting annoyance. To banish it finally she went to her state-room and got a book for herself and a magazine for her aunt.

An hour later, when Miss Gilman had finished cutting the leaves of the magazine, and was deep in the last instalment of the current serial, Charlotte let her book slip from her fingers and gave herself to the passive enjoyment of the slowly passing panorama which is the chief charm of inland voyaging.

It was a delectable day, sweet-scented with the mingled perfume of roses and jasmine and china-berry trees wafted from the open-air conservatories surrounding the plantation mansions on either bank. The majestic onrush of the steamer, the rhythmic drumbeat of the machinery, the alternating crash and pause of the great paddle-wheels, the unhasting backward sweep of the brown flood, all these were in harmony with the sensuous languor of time and place.

For the moment Charlotte Farnham yielded in pure delight to the spell of the encompassments, fancying she could deny her lineage and look upon this sylvan Southland world through the eyes of those

to whom it was the birthland. Then the haunting scene in the New Orleans bank returned to disenchant her; and after striving vainly to put it aside, she reopened her book. But by this time the story had lost its hold upon her, and when she had read a page or two with only the vaguest possible notion of what it was all about, she gave up in despair and let the relentless recollection have its will of her.

From where she was sitting she could see the steamer's yawl swinging from its tackle at the stern-staff; and after many minutes it was slowly borne in upon her that the ropes were working loose. When it became evident that the boat would shortly fall into the river and go adrift, she got up and put the book aside, meaning to go forward and tell the captain. But before she had taken the first step a man came aft to make the loosened tackle fast, and she stood back to let him pass.

It was Griswold. Up to that moment he had thrown himself so zealously into the impersonation of his latest rôle as to be able to stand indifferently well in the shoes of the man whom he had supplanted. But at this crisis the machinery of dissimulation slipped a cog. Where the ordinary deck-hand would have gone about his errand heedless of the presence of the two women passengers, the proxy John Wesley Gavitt must needs take off his cap and apologize for passing in front of them.

Something half familiar in his manner of doing it attracted Charlotte's attention, and her eyes fol-

lowed him as he went on and hoisted the yawl into place. When he came back she had a fair sight of his face and her eyes met his. In the single swift glance half-formed suspicion became undoubted certainty; she looked again and her heart gave a great bound and then seemed suddenly to forget its office. While he was passing she clung to the back of her chair and forebore to cry out or otherwise to advertise her emotion. But when the strain was off she sank into her seat and closed her eyes to grapple with the unnerving discovery. It was useless to try to escape from the dismaying fact. The stubble-bearded deck-hand with the manners of a gentleman was most unmistakably a later reincarnation of the pleasantly smiling young man who had courteously made way for her at the teller's wicket in the Bayou State Security; who had smiled and given place to her while he was holding his pistol aimed at President Galbraith.

It was said of Charlotte Farnham that she was sensible beyond her years, and withal strong and straightforward in honesty of purpose. None the less, she was a woman. And when she saw what was before her, conscience turned traitor and fled away to give place to an uprush of hesitant doubts born of the sharp trial of the moment.

She decided at once that there could be no question as to her duty. Of all those who were seeking the escaping bank robber, it was doubtful if any would recognize him as she had; and if she should hold her peace he would escape, perhaps to commit

other crimes for which she could then justly be held accountable.

But, on the other hand, how could she bring herself to the point of giving him over to the vengeance of the law—just vengeance, to be sure, but cruel because it must inevitably crush out whatever spark of penitence or good intention there might be remaining in him? What did she know of his temptations? of the chain of circumstances which had dragged him down into the company of the desperately criminal? Some such compelling influence there must have been, she reasoned, since a child might see that he was no hardened felon. It was a painful conflict, but in the end the Puritan conscience triumphed and turned mercy out of doors. Her duty was plain; she had no right to argue the question of culpability.

She got upon her feet, steadying herself by the back of the chair. She felt that she could not trust herself if she once admitted the thin edge of the wedge of delay. The simple and straightforward thing to do was to go immediately to the captain and tell him of her discovery, but she shrank from the thought of what must follow. They would seize him: he had proved that he was a desperate man, and there would be a struggle. And when the struggle was over they would bring him to her and she would have to stand forth as his accuser.

It was too shocking, and she caught at the suggestion of an alternative with a gasp of relief. She might write to President Galbraith, giving such a

description of the deck-hand as would enable the officers to identify him without her personal help. It was like dealing the man a treacherous blow in the back, but she thought it would be kinder.

"Aunt Fanny," she began, with her face averted, "I promised you I wouldn't write to Mr. Galbraith until after we reached home—until I had told papa. I have been thinking about it since, and I—I think it must be done at once."

Now Miss Gilman's conscience was also of the Puritan cast, and justice had been given time to make its claim paramount to that of the conventional proprieties. Hence the invalid yielded the point without reopening the argument.

"I don't know but you are right, after all, Charlie, dear," she said. "I've been thinking it over, too. But it seems like a very dreadful thing for you to have to do."

"It *is* very dreadful," said Charlotte, with a much deeper meaning in the words than her aunt suspected. Nevertheless, she went away quickly and locked herself in her state-room to write the fateful letter which should set the machinery of the law in motion and deliver the robber deck-hand up to justice.

VII

GOLD OF TOLOSA

In yielding to the impulse which had prompted him to change places with the broken-down deckhand, Griswold had assumed that there was little risk and at least an even chance that the substitution would never be discovered. He knew that the river steamboats were manned by picked-up crews, usually assembled at the last moment, and that it was more than probable that the *Belle Julie's* officers had not yet had time to individualize the units of the main-deck squad. Therefore, he might take the name and place of the disabled Gavitt with measurable safety.

But apart from this, he was not unwilling to add another chapter to his experience among the toilers. He had been told that the life of a roustabout on the Western rivers was the most dismal of all the gropings in the social underworld, and he was the more eager to endure its hardships as a participant. Being an enthusiast, he had early laid down the foundation principle that one must see and feel and suffer if one would write convincingly.

As to the experience, he immediately found himself in a fair way to acquire it in great abundance.

From the moment of his enlistment in the *Belle Julie's* crew it was heaped upon him unstintingly; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. Without having specialized himself in any way to M'Grath, the bullying chief mate, he fancied he was singled out as the vessel into which the man might empty the vials of his wrath without fear of reprisals. Curses, not loud—since a generation of travellers has arisen to whom profanity, however picturesque, is objectionable—but deep and corrosive; contumely and abuse; tongue-lashings that stung like the flick of a whip; and now and then, at a night landing when there were no upper-deck people looking on to be shocked, blows. All these slave-drivings, or at least his share of them, Griswold endured as became a man who had voluntarily put himself in the way of them. But they were hardening. Griswold fought manfully against the brutalizing effect of them, but with only partial success. Because of them, he was sure that his theories in the compassionate warp and woof of them must always afterward be shot through with flame-colored threads of fiery resentment reaching back through M'Grath to every master who wielded the whip of power; the power of the man who has, over the man who has not.

In such a lurid light it was only natural that the ethical perspective should be still further distorted; that any lingering doubt of the justice of his late rebellion against the accepted order of things should be banished by the persecutions of the bullying mate.

It is easy to postulate a storm-driven world when the personal horizon is dark and lowering; easy, also, to justify the past by the present. From theorizing never so resolutely upon the rights of man in the abstract to robbing a bank is a broad step, and given an opportunity to reflect upon it calmly after the fact, even such an imaginative enthusiast as Griswold might have reconsidered. But the hasty plunge into the underdepth of roustabout life was like the brine bath of the blacksmith to heated steel; it served to temper him afresh.

Fortunately he was not altogether unequal to the physical test, severe as it was. With all of his later privations, he had lived a clean life; and his college training in athletics stood him in good stead. Physically, as intellectually, the material in him was of the fine-grained fibre in which quality counts for more than quantity. Lacking something in mass, the lack was more than compensated by the alertness and endurance which had made him at once the best man with the foils and the safest oar in the boat in his college days. None the less, the first night out of New Orleans, with its uncounted plantation landings, had tried him keenly, and he was thankful when the second day brought fewer stopping places and longer rest intervals.

It was in one of the resting intervals that he had been sent aft to resecure the loosened tackle of the suspended small boat. He had come upon Miss Farnham and her aunt unexpectedly, and so was off his guard. But in any event, he argued, he should

have obeyed the instinctive impulse to excuse himself. He knew that the apology was a confession that he was a masquerader in some sort, and he had felt the steady gaze of the young woman's eyes while he was at work on the loosened tackle. Later, when he passed her on his way forward he had seen the swift change in her face betokening some sudden emotion, and the recollection of it troubled him.

What if this clear-eyed young person had recognized him? He knew that the New Orleans papers had come aboard; he had seen the folded copy of the *Louisianian* in the invalid's lap. Consequently, Miss Farnham knew of the robbery, and the incidents were fresh in her mind. What would she do if she had penetrated his disguise?

The query had its answer when he recalled his written estimate of her character scribbled a few hours earlier by the light of the engine-room incandescent. If her face were not merely a fair mask of the conscientious probity it stood for, she would denounce him without hesitation.

He tried to make himself doubt it, but the effort recoiled upon him. Already, in his imaginings, she was beginning to assume the characteristics of an ideal; and the ideal character with which he had endowed her would be true to itself at any cost; it would be quite sexless and just before it would be womanly and merciful. At least he hoped it would. Ideals are much too precious to be shattered recklessly by mere personal considerations; and he told himself, in a fine glow of artistic self-effacement, that

he should be sorry to purchase even so great a boon as his liberty at the price of the broken ideal.

But the burning of sweet incense in the temple of the ideals is not necessarily incompatible with a just regard for the commonplace realities. In the aftermath of the fine artistic glow, Griswold found himself straightway wrestling with the problem of present safety. If Miss Farnham had recognized him, his chances of escape had suddenly narrowed down to flight, immediate and speedy. He must leave the *Belle Julie* at the next landing and endeavor to make his way north by wagon-road or rail, or by some later boat.

The emergency called for swift action, and his determination to leave the steamer was taken at once. While he was weighing the manifest dangers of a daylight desertion against the equally manifest hazard of waiting for darkness, the whistle was blown for a landing and he concluded not to wait. If Miss Farnham had identified him she would doubtless lose no time in giving the alarm. She might even now be in conference with the captain, he thought.

Griswold had a shock of genuine terror at this point in his reflections and his skin prickled as at the touch of something loathsome. Up to that moment he had suffered none of the pains of the hunted fugitive; but he knew now that he had fairly entered the gates of the outlaw's inferno; that however cunningly he might cast about to throw his pursuers off the track, he would never again know

what it was to be wholly free from the terror of the arrow that flieth by day.

The force of the Scriptural simile came to him with startling emphasis, bringing on a return of the prickling dismay. The stopping of the paddle-wheels and the rattling clangor of the gang-plank winch aroused him to action and he shook off the creeping numbness and ran aft to rummage under the cargo on the engine-room guards for his precious bundle. When his hand reached the place where it should have been, the blood surged to his brain and set up a clamorous dinning in his ears like the roaring of a cataract. The niche between the coffee sacks was empty.

VIII

THE CHAIN-GANG

While Griswold was grappling afresh with the problem of escape, and planning to desert the *Belle Julie* at the next landing, Charlotte Farnham was sitting behind the locked door of her state-room with a writing pad on her knee over which for many minutes the suspended pen merely hovered. She had fancied that her resolve, once fairly taken, would not stumble over a simple matter of detail. But when she had tried a dozen times to begin the letter to Mr. Galbraith, the simplicities vanished and complexity stood in their room.

Try as she might to put the sham deck-hand into his proper place as an impersonal unit of a class with which society is at war, he perversely refused to surrender his individuality. At the end of every fresh effort she was confronted by the inexorable summing-up: in a world of phantoms there were only two real persons; a man who had sinned, and a woman who was about to make him pay the penalty.

It was all very well to reason about it, and to say that he ought to be made to pay the penalty; but that did not make it any less shocking that she, Charlotte Farnham, should be the one to set the

retributive machinery in motion. Yet she knew she had the thing to do, and so, after many ineffectual attempts, the letter was written and sealed and addressed, and she went out to mail it at the clerk's office.

As it chanced, the engines of the steamer were slowing for a landing when she latched her stateroom door, and by the time she had walked the length of the saloon the office was closed and the clerk had gone below with his way-bills. It was an added hardship to have to wait, and she knew well enough that delay would speedily reopen the entire vexed question of responsibility. But there was nothing else to be done. She told herself that she could not begin to breathe freely again until the letter was out of her hands and safely beyond recall.

The doors giving upon the forward saloon-deck were open, and she heard the harsh voice of the mate exploding in sharp commands as the steamer lost way and edged slowly up to the river bank. A moment later she was outside, leaning on the rail and looking down upon the crew grouped about the inboard end of the uptilted landing-stage. He was there; the man for whose destiny accident and the conventional sense of duty had made her responsible; and as she looked she had a fleeting glimpse of his face.

It was curiously haggard and woe-begone; so sorrowfully changed that for an instant she almost doubted his identity. The sudden transformation added fresh questionings, and she began to ask her-

self thoughtfully what had brought it about. Had he recognized her and divined her intention? But if that were the explanation, why had he not made his escape? Why was he waiting for her to point him out to the officers of the steamer?

The queries swept her out into a deeper sea of perplexity. What if he were already repentant? In that event, the result of her dutiful service to society would doubtless be to drive him back into impenitence and despair. For a little time she clung desperately to her purpose, hardening her heart and shutting her ears to the clamant appeal of the reawakened sentiment of commiseration. Then the man turned slowly and looked up at her as if the finger of her thought had touched him. There was no sign of recognition in his eyes; and she constrained herself to gaze down upon him coldly. But when the *Belle Julie's* bow touched the bank, and the waiting crew melted suddenly into a tenuous line of burden-bearers, she fled through the deserted saloon to her state-room and hid the fatal letter under the pillows in her berth.

Another hour had elapsed. It was nearly noon, and the stewards had bridged the spaces in the row of square saloon-tables and were laying the cloth for the mid-day meal. Charlotte opened her door guardedly, as one fearing to face prying eyes, and finding the coast clear, slipped out to rejoin her aunt under the awning abaft the paddle-box. Miss Gilman shut her finger into the magazine to keep her place and looked up in mild surprise.

"Where have you been?" she asked. "Has it taken you all this time to write to the bank people?"

Charlotte's answer satisfied the strict letter of the inquiry, though it slew the spirit.

"I wrote the letter quite awhile ago. I have been lying down, since."

The invalid reopened the magazine, and Charlotte was left to make peace as best she might with her conscience for having told the half-truth. It was characteristic of the inward monitor that even in such a trivial matter it refused to be coerced. Accordingly, a little while afterward, when Charlotte took her aunt's arm to lead her to the table, she said:

"I told you I had written to Mr. Galbraith, and so I have. But the letter is not yet mailed." And, since the natural inference was that there had been no opportunity to mail it, the conscientious little confession went as wide of the mark as if it had never been made.

At the captain's end of the long table the talk rippled pointlessly around the New Orleans bank robbery, and Miss Farnham took no part in it until Captain Mayfield spoke of the reward of ten thousand dollars which had been offered for the apprehension of the robber. The fact touched her upon the ethical side, and she said:

"That is something that always seems so dreadfully barbarous; to set a money price on the head of a human being."

The captain laughed.

"'Tis sort o' Middle-Aged, when you come to think of it. But it does the police business oftener than anything else, I guess. A detective will work mighty hard nowadays for ten thousand dollars."

"Yes, I suppose so; but it is barbarous," Charlotte persisted. "It is an open appeal to the lowest motive in human nature—cupidity."

The bluff riverman nodded a qualified approval, but a loquacious little gentleman across the table felt called upon to protest.

"But, my dear Miss Farnham, would you have us all turn thief-catchers for the mere honor of the thing?"

"For the love of justice, or not at all, I should say," was the straightforward return blow. "If I should see somebody picking your pocket, ought I to weigh the chances of your offering a reward before telling you of it?"

"Oh, no; of course not. But this is entirely different. A rich corporation has been robbed, and it says to the thief-catchers—and to everybody, for that matter—Here are ten thousand dollars if you will find us the robber. For myself, I confess that the reward would be the determining factor. If I knew where Mr. Galbraith's 'hold-up' is to be found, I should certainly go out of my way to earn the money."

Miss Farnham's sense of the fitness of things was plainly affronted.

"Do you mean to say that you would accept the reward, Mr. Latrobe?"

"Most certainly I should; any one would."

The frank avowal stood for public opinion. Charlotte knew it and went dumb in the presence of a new and more terrible phase of her entanglement. She might call the reward blood money, and refuse absolutely to touch it, but who, outside of her own little circle, would know or believe that she had refused? And if all the remainder of the world knew and should exonerate her, would not the wretched man himself always believe that she had sold him for a price?

The benumbing thought left her tongue-tied and miserable; and after the table-dispersal she sought out the captain to ask a question.

"Do you know the law in Louisiana, Captain Mayfield?" she began, with more embarrassment than the simple inquiry would account for. "This man who robbed the Bayou State Security yesterday; what is the penalty for his crime?"

The captain shook his head. "I don't know: being only a riverman, I'm not even a sea-lawyer. But maybe Mr. Latrobe could tell you. *Oh*, Mr. Latrobe!"

The loquacious one was on his way forward to smoke, but he turned and came back at the captain's call.

"The penalty?" he said, when the query had been repeated to him; "that would depend upon a good many things that could only be brought out at the trial. But under the circumstances—threatening to shoot the president, and all that, you know

—I should say it would go pretty hard with him. He'll probably get the full limit of the law."

"And that is?" persisted Charlotte, determined to know the worst.

"In Louisiana, twenty years, I believe."

"Thank you; that is what I wished to find out."

The little man bowed and went his way; and Captain Mayfield, who was an observant man in the field of river stages and other natural phenomena, but not otherwise, did not remark Miss Farnham's sigh which was more than half a sob.

"Twenty years!" she shuddered; "it might as well be for life. He would be nearly fifty years old, if he lived through it."

It did not occur to the captain to wonder how Miss Farnham came to know anything about the bank robber's age, but he spoke to the conditional phrase in her comment.

"Yes; if he lives through it: that's a mighty big 'if' down here in the levee country. Twenty years of the chain-gang would be about the same as a life sentence to most white men, I judge."

Charlotte turned away quickly; and when she could trust herself in the presence of her aunt, she led the way back to the shade of the after-deck awning and tried, for her own sake, to talk about some of the many things that had gone to make up the sum of their daily life before this black cloud of perplexity had settled down. It was a dismaying failure; and when the invalid said she would go and lie down for awhile, Charlotte was thankful and

went once more to lock herself and her trouble in her state-room.

That evening, after dinner, she went forward with some of the other passengers to the railed promenade which was the common evening rendezvous. The *Belle Julie* had tied up at a small town on the western bank of the great river, and the ant procession of roustabouts was in motion, going laden up the swing-stage and returning empty by the foot-plank. Left to herself for a moment, Charlotte faced the rail and again sought to single out the man whose fate she must decide.

She distinguished him presently; a grimy, perspiring unit in the crew, tramping back and forth mechanically, staggering under the heaviest loads, and staring stonily at the back of his file leader in the endless round; a picture of misery and despair, Charlotte thought, and she was turning away with the dangerous rebellion against the conventions swelling again in her heart when Captain Mayfield joined her.

"I just wanted to show you," he said; and he pointed out a gang of men repairing a slip in the levee embankment below the town landing. It was a squad of prisoners in chains. The figures of the convicts were struck out sharply against the dark background of undergrowth, and the reflection of the sunset glow on the river lighted up their sullen faces and burnished the use-worn links in their leg-fetters.

"The chain-gang," said the captain, briefly.

"That's about where the fellow that robbed the Bayou State Security will bring up, if they catch him. He'll have to be mighty tough and well-seasoned if he lives to worry through twenty years of that, don't you think?"

But Miss Farnham could not answer; and even the unobservant captain of river boats saw that she was moved and was sorry he had spoken.

IX

THE MIDDLE WATCH

In any path of performance there is but one step which is irrevocable, namely, the final one, and in Charlotte Farnham's besetment this step was the mailing of the letter to Mr. Galbraith. Many times during the evening she wrought herself up to the plunging point, only to recoil on the very brink; and when at length she gave up the struggle and went to bed, the sealed letter was still under her pillow.

Now it is a well-accepted truism that an exasperated sense of duty, like remorse and grief, fights best in the night-watches. It was of no avail to protest that her intention was still unshaken. Conscience urged that delay was little less culpable than refusal, since every hour gave the criminal an added chance of escape. The logic was unanswerable, and trembling lest the implacable inward monitor should presently insist upon the immediate revealment of the fugitive's identity to Captain Mayfield, she got up and dressed hurriedly, meaning to end the agony once for all by giving the letter to the night clerk.

But once again the chapter of accidents intervened. While she was unbolting her door, the mellow roar of the whistle and the jangling of the engine-

room bells warned her that the *Belle Julie* was approaching a landing. Remembering the cause of her earliest failure, she ran quickly to the office, only to find it deserted and the door locked.

This time, however, she determined not to be diverted. Going back to the state-room for a wrap she returned to wait for the clerk's reappearance. This final pause soon proved to be the severest trial of all. The minutes dragged leaden-winged, and to sit quietly in the silence and solitude of the great saloon became a nerve-racking impossibility. When it went past endurance, she rose and stepped out upon the promenade-deck.

The electric search-light eye on the hurricane-deck was just over her head, and its great white cone seemed to hiss as it poured its dazzling flood of fictitious noonday upon the shelving river bank and the sleeping hamlet beyond. The furnace doors were open, and the red glare of the fires quickened the darkness under the beam of the electric into lurid life. Out of the dusky underglow came the freight-carriers, giving birth to a file of grotesque shadow monsters as they swung up the plank into the field of the search-light.

The stopping-place was an unimportant one, and a few minutes sufficed for the unloading of the small consignment of freight. The mate had left his outlook upon the hurricane-deck and was down among the men, hastening them with harsh commands and epithets which owed their mildness to the presence of the silent onlooker beneath the electric.

The foot-plank had been drawn in, the steam winch was clattering, and the landing-stage had begun to come aboard, when the two men whose duty it was to cast off ran out on the tilting stage and dropped from its shore end. One of them fell clumsily, tried to rise, and sank back into the shadow; but the other scrambled up the steep bank and loosened the half-hitches in the wet hawser. With the slackening of the line the steamer began to move out into the stream, and the man at the mooring-post looked around to see what had become of his companion.

"Get a move on youse!" bellowed the mate; but instead of obeying, the man ran back and went on his knees beside the huddled figure in the shadow.

At this point the watcher on the promenade-deck began vaguely to understand that the first man was disabled in some way, and that the other was trying to lift him. While she looked, the engine-room bells jangled and the wheels began to turn. The mate forgot her and swore out of a full heart.

She put her fingers in her ears to shut out the clamor of abusive profanity; but the man on the bank paid no attention to the richly emphasized command to come aboard. Instead, he ran swiftly to the mooring-post, took a double turn of the trailing hawser around it and stood by until the straining line snubbed the steamer's bow to the shore. Then, deftly casting off again, he darted back to the disabled man, hoisted him bodily to the high guard, and

clambered aboard himself, all this while M'Grath was brushing the impeding crew aside to get at him.

Charlotte saw every move of the quick-witted salvage in the doing, and wanted to cry out in sheer enthusiasm when it was done. Then, in the light from the furnace doors, she saw the face of the chief actor: it was the face of the man with the stubble beard.

The night was summer warm, but she shrank back and shivered as if a cold wind had breathed upon her. Why must he make it still harder for her by posing as the defender of the wretched negro? She would look on no longer; she would. . . . The harsh voice of the mate, dominating the noise of the machinery and the churning of the paddle-wheels, drew her irresistibly to the rail. She could not hear what M'Grath was saying, but she could read hot wrath in his gestures, and in the way the men fell back out of his reach. All but one: the stubble-bearded white man was facing him fearlessly, and he appeared to be trying to explain.

Griswold was trying to explain, but the bullying first officer would not let him. It was a small matter: with the money gone, and the probability that capture and arrest were deferred only from landing to landing, a little abuse, more or less, counted as nothing. But he was grimly determined to keep M'Grath from laying violent hands upon the negro who had twisted his ankle in jumping from the uptilted landing-stage.

"No; this is one time when you don't skin any-

body alive!" he retorted, when a break in the stream of abuse gave him a chance. "You let the man alone. He couldn't help it. Do you suppose he sprained an ankle purposely to give you a chance to curse him out?"

The mate's reply was a brutal kick at the crippled negro. Griswold came closer.

"Don't try that again!" he warned, angrily. "If you've got to take it out on somebody, I'm your man."

This was mutiny, and M'Grath's remedy for that distemper was ever heroic. In a flash his big fist shot out and the crew looked to see its lighter champion go backward into the river at the impact. But the blow did not land. Griswold saw it coming and swerved the necessary body-breadth. The result was a demonstration of a simple theorem in dynamics. M'Grath reeled under the impetus of his own unresisted effort, stumbled forward against the low edge-line bulwark, clawed wildly at the fickle air and dropped overboard like a stone.

At the splashing plunge Griswold saw, planned, and acted in the same instant. The *Belle Julie* was forging ahead at full speed, and if the mate did not drown at once, the projecting paddle-wheel would batter the life out of him as he passed under it.

Clearing the intervening obstacles in a hurdler's leap, Griswold raced aft on the outer edge of the guards and jumped overboard in time to grapple the drowning man when he was within a few feet of the churning wheel. The struggle was short but

fierce. Griswold got a strangling arm around the big man's neck and strove to sink with him so that the wheel might pass over them. He was only partly successful. The mate was terror-crazed and fought blindly. There was no time for trick or stratagem, and when the thunder of the wheel roared overhead, Griswold felt the jar of a blow and the mate's struggles ceased abruptly. A gasping moment later the worst was over and the rescuer had his head out; was swimming gallantly in the wake of the steamer, supporting the unconscious M'Grath and shouting lustily for help.

The help came quickly. The alarm had been promptly given, and the night pilot was a man for an emergency. Before the little-used yawl could be lowered, the steamer had swept a wide circle in mid-stream and the search-light picked up the castaways. From that to placing the *Belle Julie* so that the two bits of human flotsam could be hauled in over the bows was but a skilful hand's-turn of rudder-work, accomplished as cleverly as if the great steamboat had been a power-driven launch to be steered by a touch of the tiller.

All this Charlotte saw. She was looking on when the two men were dragged aboard, the big Irishman still unconscious, and the rescuer in the final ditch of exhaustion—breathless, sodden, reeling with weariness.

And afterward, when the *Belle Julie's* prow was once more turned to the north, Miss Farnham had no thought of stopping at the clerk's office when she

flew back to her state-room with the letter to Mr. Galbraith hidden in her bosom and clutched tightly as if she were afraid it might cry out its accusing secret of its own accord.

X

QUICKSANDS

On the morning following the rescue of the mate, Charlotte Farnham awoke with the conviction that she had been miraculously saved from incurring the penalties dealt out to those who rush blindly into the thick of things without due thought and careful consideration.

In the light of a new day it seemed almost incredible that, only a few hours earlier, she could have been so rash as to assume that there was no possibility of a mistake; that she had been on the verge of sending a possibly innocent man to answer as he could for the sins of the guilty.

Who could be sure? Could she go into court and swear that this man and the man she had seen in the bank were one and the same? Yesterday she had thought that she could; but to-day she was equally sure that she could not.

But the Puritan conscience was not to be entirely silenced. Reason sits in a higher seat than that occupied by the senses, and reason argued that a man who would forgive his enemy, and instantly risk his life in proof of the forgiveness, could not be a desperate criminal. Conscience pointed out the

alternative. A little careful investigation would remove the doubt—or confirm it. Somebody on the boat must know the deck-hand, or know enough about him to establish his real identity.

Naturally, Charlotte thought first of Captain Mayfield; and when breakfast was over, and she had settled her aunt in the invalid's chair under the shade of the after-awning, she went on her quest.

The captain was on the port promenade, forward, and he was about to light his after-breakfast cigar. But he threw the match away when Miss Farnham came out and took the chair he placed for her.

"Please smoke if you want to," she said, noting the clipped cigar; "I don't mind it in the least."

"Thank you," said the master of the *Belle Julie*, shifting his chair to leeward and finding another match. He had grown daughters of his own, and Miss Farnham reminded him of the one who lived in St. Louis and took her dead mother's place in a home which would otherwise have held no welcome for a grizzled old river-sailor.

For a time Miss Farnham seemed to have forgotten what she came to say, and the ash grew longer on the captain's cigar. It was another delectable day, and the *Belle Julie* was still churning the brown flood in the majestic reaches of the lower river. Down on the fore-deck the roustabouts were singing. It was some old-time plantation melody, and Charlotte could not catch the words; but the blending harmony, rich in the altogether inimitable timbre of the African song-voice, rose above

the throbbing of the engines and the splash of the paddles.

"They are happy, those men?" said Charlotte, turning suddenly upon the silent old riverman at her side.

"The nigger 'rousties,' you mean?—oh, yes. I guess so."

"But it is such a hard life," she protested. "I don't see how they can sing."

The captain smiled good-naturedly.

"It is a pretty hard life," he admitted. "But they're in a class by themselves. You couldn't hire a river nigger to do anything else. Then, again, a man doesn't miss what he's never had. They get a plenty to eat, and the soft side of a cargo pile makes a pretty good bed, if you've never slept in a better one."

Miss Farnham shook her head thoughtfully. "Isn't that putting them terribly low in the scale of humanity? Surely there must be some among them who are capable of better things." She was trying desperately hard to lead up to the stubble-bearded man, and it was the most difficult task she had ever set herself.

"Not among the black boys, I'm afraid. Now and then a white man drifts into a crew, but that's a different matter."

"Better or worse?" she queried.

"Worse, usually. It's a pretty poor stick of a white man that can't find something better than 'rousting' on a steamboat."

Here was her chance, and she took it courageously.

"Haven't you one man in the *Belle Julie's* crew who has earned a better recommendation than that, Captain Mayfield?"

"You mean that sick hobo who went into the river after M'Grath last night? I didn't know that story had got back to the ladies' cabin."

"It hasn't. But I know it because I was looking on. I couldn't sleep, and I had gone out to see them make a night landing. Why do you call him 'the sick hobo'?"

The captain was paying strict attention now, looking at her curiously from beneath the grizzled eyebrows. But he saw only the classic profile.

"That's what he is—or at least, what he let on to be when he shipped with us," he replied. Then: "You say you saw it: tell me what happened."

"I am not sure that I quite understood the beginning of it," she said doubtfully. "Two men, the white man and a negro, went ashore to untie the boat. They both jumped from the stage while it was going up, and it was the white man who untied the rope alone. After the boat began to swing away from the bank, he saw that the other man was hurt and went to help him. Mr. M'Grath was angry and he shouted at them to come aboard. With the boat going away from the shore, they couldn't; so the white man ran and tied the rope again. Am I getting it awfully mixed up?"

"Not at all," said the captain. "What happened then?"

"The white man lifted the negro to the deck, untied the rope again, and climbed on just as the boat was swinging away the second time. Mr. M'Grath was furious. He fought his way to where the white man was standing over the hurt negro and struck at him. The next thing I knew, Mr. M'Grath was overboard and right down here in front of the paddle-wheel, and the man he had tried to strike was jumping in after him. I thought they would both be ground to death under the wheel."

"Is that all?"

"All but the rescue. The pilot turned the *Belle Julie* around and they were picked up. Mr. M'Grath was unconscious, and the other man was too weak to stand up."

Captain Mayfield nodded. "He was sick when he came to us: consumption, Mac said."

Miss Farnham was a doctor's daughter, and she had seen many victims of the white death.

"I think that must have been a mistake," she ventured. "He doesn't look at all like a tuberculosis patient."

Again the captain was curious.

"How could you tell, at that distance and in the night?" he asked quizzically.

Embarrassment quickly flung down a handful of obstacles in Charlotte's path, but she picked her way among them.

"I saw him yesterday morning quite close, and I looked at him because—because I thought I had

seen him somewhere before. Do you know anything about him, Captain Mayfield?—who he is, I mean?"

"Not any more than I do about the rest of them. They're driftwood, mostly, you understand. We pick them up and drop them, here and there and everywhere. This fellow's name is Gavitt—John Wesley Gavitt—on the clerk's book. Mac said he was a sick hobo, working his way to St. Louis."

"How long before the beginning of a voyage do you hire the crew?" asked Charlotte, trying not to seem too pointedly interested.

"Oh, they string along all through the loading for two or three days, and from that right up to the last minute."

It was discouraging, and she was on the point of giving up. Her one hope now lay in the fixing of the exact time of the man Gavitt's enlistment in the *Belle Julie's* crew, and there appeared to be only one way of determining this.

"Does anybody know—could anybody tell just when this particular man was hired, Captain Mayfield?" she asked.

"Not unless Mac happens to remember. No, hold on; I recollect now; it was the day we left New Orleans—day before yesterday, that was."

"In the morning?"

If the good-natured captain was beginning to wonder why his pretty passenger was cross-examining him so closely, he did not betray it.

"It was about noon, I believe. Two or three of

the black boys had skipped out at the last minute, as they always do, and we were short-handed. Mac said the fellow didn't look as if he could stand much, but he took him anyhow."

Once more the slender thread of investigation lay broken in her hands. The robbery had been committed at or very near eleven o'clock, and an hour would have given the robber time enough to disguise himself and reach the steamer. But since the captain did not seem altogether positive as to the exact hour, she tried again.

"Please try to remember exactly, Captain Mayfield," she pleaded. "I *must* find out, if I can—for reasons which I can't explain to any one. Was it just at noon?"

Now this veteran master of packet boats was the last man in the world to be heroically accurate when his sympathies were appealed to by a winsome young woman in evident distress; and while he would cheerfully have sworn that it was eleven o'clock or one o'clock when John Gavitt came aboard, if he had known certainly which statement would relieve her, her query left him no hint to steer by.

So he said: "Oh, I say, 'about noon,' but it might have been an hour or two before, or any time after, till we cleared. But we'll find out. We'll have the fellow up here and put him on the witness stand. Or I'll go below and dig into him for you myself, if you say so."

"Not for the world!" she protested, aghast at the bare suggestion; and for fear it might be re-

peated in some less evadable form, she made an excuse of her duty and ran away to her aunt.

Later in the day, when she had sought in vain for some other, this suggestion of Captain Mayfield's came back. While there was the smallest chance that she had been mistaken, she dared not send the letter to Mr. Galbraith; yet it was clearly her duty to get at the truth of the matter, if she could.

But how? If Captain Mayfield could not remember the exact time of John Gavitt's enrolment as a member of the *Belle Julie's* crew, it was more than probable that no one else could; no one but the man himself. It was at this point that the captain's suggestion returned to strike fire like steel upon reluctant flint. Could she go to the length of questioning Gavitt? If she should, would he tell her the truth? And if he should tell the truth, would it make the distressing duty any easier? Not easier, she concluded, but possibly less puzzling.

Thus far the suggestion: but without the help of some third person, she did not see how it could be carried out. She could neither go to him nor summon him; and the alternative of taking the captain into her confidence was rejected at once as being too hazardous. For the captain might not scruple to take the matter into his own hands without ceremony, sending the suspected man back to New Orleans to establish his innocence—if he could.

Charlotte worried over the wretched entanglement all day, and was so distrait and absent-minded that her aunt remarked it, naming it malaria and pre-

scribing quinine. Whereat Charlotte dissembled and put on a mask of cheerfulness, keeping it on until after the evening meal and her aunt's early retiring. But when she was released, she was glad enough to go out on the promenade just forward of the starboard paddle-box, where there were no after-dinner loungers, to be alone with her problem and free to plunge once more into its intricacies.

It was possibly ten minutes later, while she stood leaning against a stanchion and watching the lights of a distant town rise out of the watery horizon ahead, that chance, the final arbiter in so many human involvements, led her quickly into the valley of decision. She heard a man's step on the steeply pitched stair leading down from the hurricane-deck. Before she could turn away he was confronting her; the man whose name on the *Belle Julie's* crew roster was John Wesley Gavitt.

XI

THE ANARCHIST

GRISWOLD'S appearance was less fortuitous than it seemed to be. As a reward of merit for having saved the mate's life, he had been told off to serve temporarily as man-of-all-work for the day pilot, who chanced to be without a steersman. His watch in the pilot-house was over, and he was on his way to the crew's quarters below when he stumbled upon Miss Farnham. Mindful of his earlier slip, he passed her as if she had been invisible. She let him go until her opportunity was all but lost; then, plucking courage out of the heart of desperation, she spoke.

"One moment, if you please; I—I want to ask you something," she faltered; and he wheeled obediently and faced her.

Followed a pause, inevitable, but none the less awkward for the one who was responsible. Griswold felt, rather than saw, her embarrassment, and was generous enough to try to help her.

"I think I know what you wish to say: you are quite at liberty to say it," he offered, when the pause had grown into an obstacle which she seemed powerless to surmount.

"Do you? I have been hoping you wouldn't," was the quick rejoinder. Then: "Will you tell me at what time you joined the crew of the *Belle Julie?*"

The question did not surprise him, nor did he attempt to evade it.

"Between twelve and one o'clock, the day before yesterday."

"Will you tell me where you were at eleven o'clock that day?"

"Yes, if you ask me."

"I do ask you."

"I was in a certain business building in New Orleans, as near to you as I am now. Is that sufficiently definite?"

"It is. I thought perhaps—I had hoped—Oh, for goodness' sake, why did you do it?" she burst out, no longer able to fence with the weapons of indirectness.

He answered her frankly.

"It was the old story of one man's over-plenty and another man's need. Have you ever known what it means to go hungry for sheer poverty's sake?—but, of course, you haven't."

"No," she admitted.

"Well, I have; I was hungry that morning; very hungry. I know this doesn't excuse the thing—to you. But perhaps it may help to explain it."

"I think I can understand—a little. But surely——"

He stopped her with a quick little gesture.

"I know what you are going to say: that I should

have been willing to work, or even to beg, rather than steal. I was willing to work; I was not willing to beg. I know it is all wrong from your point of view; but I should be sorry to have you think that I did what *I* believed to be wrong."

"Surely you must know it is wrong?"

"Pardon me, but I can't admit that. If I could, you would be relieved of what is doubtless a very painful duty. I should surrender myself at once."

"But think of it; if you are right, every one else must be wrong!"

"No; not quite every one. But that is a very large question, and we needn't go into it. I confess that my method was unconventional; a little more summary than that of the usurers and the strictly legal robbers, but quite as defensible. For they rob the poor and the helpless, while I merely dispossessed one rich corporation of a portion of its exactions from the many."

"Then you are not sorry? I saw you yesterday afternoon and hoped you were."

He laughed unpleasantly. "I was sorry, then, and I am now; for the same reason. I have lost the money."

"Lost it?" she gasped, "How?"

"I had hidden it, and I suppose some one else has found it. It is all right, so far as the ownership is concerned; but I am still self-centred enough to be chagrined about it."

"But that is nothing!" she protested, with sharp regret in her voice; "now you can never return it!"

"I didn't intend to," he assured her, gravely. "I did have some notion of redistributing it fairly among those who need it most; but that was all."

"But you must have returned it in the end. You could never have been content to keep it."

"Do you think so?" he rejoined. "I think I could have been quite content to keep it. But that is past; it is gone, and I couldn't return it if I wanted to."

"No," she acquiesced; "and that makes it all the harder."

"For you to do what you must do? But you mustn't think of that. I shouldn't have made restitution in any event. Let me tell you what I did. I had a weapon, as you have read. I tied it up with the money in a handkerchief. There was always the chance of their catching me, and I had made up my mind that my last free act would be to drop the bundle into the river. So you see you need not hesitate on that score."

"Then you know what it is that I must do?"

"Assuredly. I knew it yesterday, when I saw that you had recognized me. It was very merciful in you to reprieve me, even for a few hours; but you will pardon me if I say it was wrong?"

"Wrong!" she burst out. "Is it generous to say that to me? Are you so indifferent yourself that you think every one else is indifferent, too?"

He smiled under cover of the darkness, and the joy of finding that his ideal was not going to be shattered was much greater than any thought of the

price he must pay to preserve it. When she paused, he had his answer ready.

"I know you are not indifferent; you couldn't be. But you must be true to yourself, at whatever cost. Will you go to Captain Mayfield now?"

She hesitated.

"I thought of doing that, at first," she began, postponing to a more convenient season the unnerving reflection that she was actually discussing the ways and means of it with him. "It seemed to be the simplest thing to do. But then I saw what would happen; that I should be obliged——"

Again he stopped her with a gesture.

"I understand. We must guard against that at all hazards. You must not be dragged into it, you know, even remotely."

"How can you think of such things at such a time?" she queried.

"I should be unworthy to stand here talking to you if I didn't think of them. But since you can't go to Captain Mayfield, what will you do? What had you thought of doing?"

"I wrote a letter to—to Mr. Galbraith," she confessed.

"And you have not sent it?"

"No. If I had, I shouldn't have spoken to you."

"To be sure. I suppose you signed the letter?"

"Certainly."

"That was a mistake. You must rewrite it, leaving out your name, and send it. All you need to say is that the man who robbed the Bayou State

Security is escaping on the *Belle Julie;* that he is disguised as a deck-hand, and that his name on the steamer's books is John Wesley Gavitt. That will be amply sufficient."

"But that isn't your name," she asserted.

"No; but that doesn't matter. It is the name that will find me."

She was silent for a moment. Then: "Why mustn't I sign it? They will pay no attention to an anonymous letter. And, besides, it seems so—so cowardly."

"They will telegraph to every river landing ahead of us within an hour after your letter reaches New Orleans; you needn't doubt that. And the suppression of your name isn't cowardly; it is merely a justifiable bit of self-protection. It is your duty to give the alarm; but when you have done that, your responsibility ceases. There are plenty of people who can identify me if I am taken back to New Orleans. You don't want to be summoned as a witness, and you needn't be."

She saw the direct, man-like wisdom of all this, and was quick to appreciate his delicate tact in effacing the question of the reward without even referring to it. But his stoicism was almost appalling.

"It is very shocking!" she murmured; "only you don't seem to realize it at all."

"Don't I? You must remember that I have been arguing from your point of view. My own is quite unchanged. It is your duty to do what you must do;

it is my affair to avert the consequences to myself, if I can manage it without taking an unfair advantage of your frankness."

"What will you do?"

"It would be bad faith now for me to try to run away from the steamer, as I meant to do. So far, you have bound me by your candor. But beyond that I make no promises. My parole will be at an end when the officers appear, and I shall do what I can to dodge, or to escape if I am taken. Is that fair?"

"It is more than fair: I can't understand."

"What is it that you can't understand?"

"How you can do this; how you can do such things as the one you did last night, and still——"

He finished the sentence for her.—"And still be a common robber of banks, and the like. I fancy it is a bit puzzling—from your point of view. Sometime, perhaps, we shall all understand things better than we do now, but to that time, and beyond it, I shall be your grateful debtor for what you have done to-night. May I go now?"

She gave him leave, and when he was gone, she went to her state-room to write as he had suggested. An hour later she gave the newly written letter to the night clerk; and the thing was done.

During the remainder of the slow up-river voyage to St. Louis, Charlotte Farnham lived as one who has fired the fuse of a dynamite charge and is momently braced for the shock of the explosion. Each morning she assured herself that the strange man

who could be a self-confessed felon one moment and a chivalrous gentleman the next was still a member of the *Belle Julie's* crew; but she became a coward of landings, not daring to look on for fear she should see him arrested and taken away.

And while the *Belle Julie* put landing after landing astern and the voyage grew older, Griswold, too, began to feel the pangs of suspense. Though he had no thought of breaking his promise, the dread of capture and trial and punishment grew until it became a threatening cloud to obscure all horizons. It was to no purpose that he called himself hard names and strove to rise superior to the overshadowing threat. It was there, and it would not be ignored. And when he faced it fairly a new dread arose in his heart; the fear that his fear might end by making him a criminal in fact—a savage to slay and die rather than be taken alive.

In the ordinary course of things, Miss Farnham's letter should have reached New Orleans in time to have procured Griswold's arrest at any one of a score of landings south of Memphis. When the spires of the Tennessee metropolis disappeared to the southward, he began to be afraid that her resolution had failed, and to bewail his broken ideal.

He had no means of knowing that she had given her letter to the night clerk within the hour of their interview on the saloon-deck promenade; nor did he, or any one else, know that it had lain unnoticed and overlooked on the clerk's desk until the *Belle Julie* reached Cairo. Such, however, was

the pregnant fact; and to this purely accidental delay Griswold owed his first sight of the chief city of Missouri lying dim and shadowy under its mantle of coal smoke.

The *Belle Julie* made her landing in the early evening, and Charlotte was busy up to the last moment getting her own and her aunt's belongings ready for the transfer to the upper river steamer on which they were to complete their journey to Minnesota. Hence, it was not until the *Belle Julie* was edging her way up to the stone-paved levee that Charlotte broke her self-imposed rule and slipped out upon the port promenade.

The swing-stage was poised in the air ready to be lowered, and two of the deck-hands were dropping from the shore end to trail the bow line up the paved slope to the nearest mooring-ring. There was an electric arc-light opposite the steamer's berth, and Charlotte shaded her eyes with her hands to follow the motions of the two bent figures under the dripping hawser.

One of the men was wearing a cap, and there was a small bundle hanging at his belt. She recognized him at once. At the mooring-ring he was the one who stooped to make the line fast, and the other, a negro, stood aside. At that moment the landing-stage fell, and in the confusion of debarkation which promptly followed, the thrilling bit of by-play at the mooring-ring passed unnoted by all save the silent watcher on the saloon-deck.

While the man in the cap was still on his knees,

two men stole from the shadow of the nearest freight pyramid and flung themselves upon him. He fought fiercely for a moment, and though he was more than doubly outweighted, rose to his feet, striking out viciously and dragging his assailants up with him. In the struggle the bundle dropped from his belt, and Charlotte saw him kick it aside. The waiting negro caught it deftly and vanished among the freight pyramids; whereupon one of the attacking pair wrenched himself out of the three-man scuffle and darted away in pursuit.

This left but a single antagonist for the fugitive, and Charlotte's sympathies deserted her convictions for the moment. But while she was biting her lip to keep from crying out, the fugitive stepped back and held out his hands; and she saw the gleam of polished metal reflecting the glare of the arc-light when the officer snapped the handcuffs upon his wrists.

It was with a distinct sense of culpability oppressing her that she went back to her aunt, and she was careful not to let the invalid see her face. Fortunately, there was a thing to be done, and the transfer to the other steamer came opportunely to help her to re-establish the balance of things distorted.

She was sorry, but, after all, the man had only himself to blame. None the less, the wish that some one else might have been his betrayer was promising to grow later into remorseful and lasting regret when, with her aunt, she left the *Belle Julie*, and walked up the levee to go aboard the *Star of the North*.

XII

MOSES ICHTHYOPHAGUS

After suffering all the pangs of those who lose between the touch and the clutch, Griswold had found the red-handkerchief bundle precisely where it had been hidden; namely, buried safely in the deck-load of sacked coffee on the engine-room guard.

It came to light in the final half-hour of the voyage, when he and his mates were transferring the coffee to the main-deck, forward. It had not been disturbed; and what had happened was obvious enough, after the fact. After its hiding, arm's-length deep, in a cranny between the sacks, some sudden jar of the boat had slightly shifted the cargo, closing one cranny and opening another.

With the money once more in his possession he had a swift return of the emotions which had thrilled him when he found himself standing on the sidewalk in front of the Bayou State Security with the block of bank-notes under his arm. Once more he was on fair fighting terms with the world, and the star of hope, which had gone out like a candle in a gust of wind at the discovery of his loss, swung high in the firmament, shining all the more brightly for its long occultation.

As to the battle for the keeping which was probably awaiting him at the St. Louis landing, the prospect of coming to blows, man-fashion, with the enemy, was not wholly unwelcome. With all of his incompletenesses this young rebel of life was no coward. If the New Orleans thief-takers were waiting for him in the shadows of the great city's landing-place, so be it; he would try to give them their money's worth: and an eager impatience to be at it got into his blood.

The few necessary preliminaries were arranged while the *Belle Julie* was backing and filling for the landing. Since to be taken with the money in his possession was to give the enemy the chance of winning at one stroke both the victory and the spoils, he made a confederate of the negro whose part he had taken in the quarrel with M'Grath. The man was grateful and loyal according to his gifts; and Griswold's need was too pressing to stick at any trifle of unintelligence.

"Mose, you'll go ashore with me on the spring line," he said, when he had found his man at the heel of the landing-stage.

"Yes, suh, Mars' Gravitt; dat's me, sholy."

"All right. You see this bundle. If anybody tackles me while we're making fast, I'm going to drop it, and you must get it and run away. Do you understand?"

The negro eyed the bundle suspiciously.

"Ain't no dinnymite, 'r nothin' er that sawt in hit, is dey, Cap'm?"

"No."

"Whut-all mus' I do when I's done tuk out wid hit?"

"Get away, first; then keep out of sight and hang around the levee for an hour or two. If I don't turn up before you get tired, pitch the thing into the river and go about your business. How much money does the captain owe you?"

"Cap'm Mayfiel'? Shuh! he don't owe me nothin'. I done draw de las' picayune dat was comin' to me yistiday—an' dat yaller nigger over yonder got it in de crap-game, same as turrers."

Griswold put a twenty-dollar bill into the black palm, and when the crap victim made out the figure of it by the glow of the furnace fires, his eyes bulged. "Gorra-mighty!" he gasped; and would have given it back.

"No, keep it; it's yours. Do exactly as I have told you, and if I'm able to keep my date with you, I'll double it. But if I don't show up, remember—the bundle goes into the river just as it is. If you open it, it'll conjure you worse than any Obi-man you ever heard of."

"No, *suh!* I ain't gwine open hit, Cap'm—not if dey's cunjah in hit; no, suh!"

"Well, there is—the worst kind of conjure this old world has ever known. But it won't hurt you if you don't meddle with it. Keep your wits about you and be ready to grab it and run. Here we go."

The pilot had found his wharfage and was edging the *Belle Julie* up to it. The bow men paid out

slack, and Griswold and the black, dropping from the swinging stage, trailed the end of the wet hawser up to the nearest mooring-ring. Though haste in making fast is the spring-line man's first duty, Griswold took a fraction of a second to look around him. The mooring-ring lay fair in the mock noonday of electric light, and there was no cover near it save a tarpaulined pyramid of sugar barrels. Up the levee slope the way was open to the one-sided river-fronting street; and beyond the tarpaulin-covered sugar were more freight pyramids, with shadowy alleys between them.

Satisfied with what he saw, Griswold bade the negro keep watch and knelt to knot the hawser in the ring. The line was water-soaked and stiff, and in the momentary struggle with it his caution relaxed its eyehold on the pyramid of sugar barrels. The lapse was hardly more than a glance aside, but it sufficed. While the negro sentinel was stammering, "L-l-lookout, Mars' Cap'm!" the trap was sprung.

In deference to the up-coming passengers from the *Belle Julie*, the two man-catchers tried to do their job quietly. But Griswold would not have it so, and he was up and had twisted himself free when a blow from a clubbed pistol drove him back to his knees. Half stunned by the clubbing, he still made shift to spring afoot again, to drop his handkerchief bundle and kick it aside, and to close with his assailants while the negro was snatching up the treasure and darting away among the freight pyra-

mids. After that he had but one thought; to keep the two plain-clothes men busy until the negro had made his escape. Even this proved to be a forlorn hope, since the smaller of the two instantly broke away to give chase, while the other stepped back, spun his weapon in air, and levelled it.

Rage-blinded as he was, Griswold knew that the levelled pistol meant surrender or death. In the fine battle-frenzy of the moment he was on the verge of accepting the alternative. Life and the love of it were merged in a fierce desire to rush Berserk-mad upon the weapon and the man behind it, and his muscles were hardening for the spring when he chanced to look past the levelled weapon to the *Belle Julie;* to the saloon-deck guard where a solitary, gray-coated figure stood clinging to a stanchion and looking on with what agonies of soul none might know. Like a flash of revealing light it came to him that the death which would be the lesser of two evils for him would brim a life-long cup of trembling for the woman whose duty it had been to betray him, and he thrust out his wrists for the manacles.

Quite naturally, the upflash of self-abnegation gave birth to renewed hope; and when his captor had handcuffed him and was walking him toward a closed carriage drawn up before the nearest saloon in the river-fronting street, he ventured to ask what he was wanted for.

"You'll find that out soon enough," was the curt reply, and nothing more was said until the carriage

was reached and the door had been jerked open. "Get in!" commanded the majesty of the law, and when the door was slammed upon the captive, the plain-clothes man turned to the driver, a little wizened Irishman with a face like a shrivelled winter apple. "What time does that New Orleans fast train pull out?"

Griswold heard the reply: "Sivin-forty-five, sorr," and something in the thin, piping voice gave him fresh courage. Through the open window of the carriage he saw his captor glance at his watch and begin an impatient sentry-beat up and down under the electric transparency advertising the particular brand of whiskey specialized by the saloon. He was evidently waiting for his colleague to bring in the negro, and time pressed.

While he looked, Griswold was conscious of a curious change creeping into heart and brain. From typifying himself as an escaping criminal the psychological objective was slowly but surely becoming the subjective. He *was* a criminal. The conclusion brought no self-accusation, no prickings of conscience. On the contrary, it swept the ground clear of all the ethical obstructions, leaving only a vast subtlety and furtiveness, the sly ferocity of the trapped animal.

Through half of the sentry-beat the big man's back was turned: Griswold's eyes measured the distance, and the new subtlety weighed the chances of a cautious opening of the carriage door, a tiger spring to the pavement, and a battering out of the man's

brains with the handcuffs. There were few passers: it might be done.

It was not because it was too cold-blooded that he put the suggestion aside. It was rather because the man-catcher himself suggested another expedient. The spring evening was raw and chilly, and the open doors of the saloon volleyed light and warmth and a beckoning invitation. Griswold's gift, prostituted to the service of the changed point of view, bade him read in the red face, the loose lip, and the bibulous eyes the temptation that was gripping the plain-clothes man. "Wait," whispered the colorless inner voice; "wait, and be ready when he goes in to get the drink he has promised himself he will never again be weak enough to take while he is on duty. It won't be long."

Griswold waited. By a careful contortion of the manacled hands, which seemed suddenly to have become endowed with the crafty deftness of the hands of a pickpocket, he found his working capital in a pocket of the short-sleeved coat. It had been diminished only by the hundred dollars put into John Gavitt's hands, and the twenty he had given the negro. He wished he might have had a glimpse of the little Irish cabman's face. Since he had not, he made two hundred dollars of the money into a compact roll and put the remainder back into the inner pocket.

It was only a minute or two after this that the red-faced man's impatience blossomed into the thirst that will not be denied, and he went into the

saloon to get a drink, first putting the cabman on guard.

"Get down here and keep an eye on this dicky-bird," he ordered. "Slug him if he tries to make a break."

But the cabman hung back.

"I'm no fightin' man, sorr; an', besides, I don't dare lave me harrses," he objected. But the officer broke in angrily.

"What the devil are you afraid of? He's got the clamps on, and couldn't hurt you if he wanted to. Come down here!"

The little Irishman clambered down from his box reluctantly, with the reins looped over his arm. When he peered in at the open window of the carriage the big man had passed beyond the swinging screens of the saloon entrance and Griswold seized his opportunity quickly.

"What's your job worth, my man?" he whispered.

The cabman snatched a swift glance over his shoulder before he ventured to answer.

"Don't yez be timptin' a poor man wid a wife an' sivin childer hangin' to um—don't yez do it, sorr!"

Griswold, the brother-keeping, would have thought twice before opening any door of temptation for a brother man. But the new Griswold had no compunctions.

"It's two hundred dollars to you if you can get me away from here before that red-faced drunkard comes back. Have a runaway—anything! Here's the money!"

For a single timorous instant the cabman hesitated. Then he took the roll of money and crammed it into his pocket without looking at it. Before Griswold could brace himself there was a quick *whish* of the whip, a piping cry from the driver, and the horses sprang away at a reckless gallop, with the little Irishman hanging to the reins and shouting feebly like a faint-hearted Automedon.

Griswold caught a passing glimpse of the red-faced man wiping his lips in the doorway of the saloon as the carriage bounded forward; and when the critical instant came, he was careful to fall out on the riverward side of the vehicle. It was a desperate expedient, since he could not wait to choose the favorable moment, and the handcuffs made him practically helpless. Chance saved the clumsy escape from resulting in a speedy recapture. When he tumbled out of the lurching carriage he was hurled violently against something that figured as a wall of solid masonry and was half stunned by the concussion. None the less, he had wit enough to lie motionless in the shadow of the wall, and the hue and cry, augmented by this time to a yelling mob, swept past without discovering him.

When it was safe to do so, he sat up and felt for broken bones. There were none; and he looked about him. The wall of masonry resolved itself into a cargo of brick piled on the levee side of the street, and obeying the primary impulse of a fugitive, he quickly put the sheltering bulk of it between himself and the lighted thoroughfare.

The next step had to be resolutely thought out. How was he to get rid of the handcuffs? Any policeman would have a key, and there were doubtless plenty of locksmiths in St. Louis. But both of these sources of assistance were out of the question. Whom, then? The answer came in one word—M'Grath. On a day when the up-river voyage was no more than fairly begun, one of the negroes in the crew had procured a bottle of bad whiskey. To pacify him the mate had put him in irons, using two pairs of handcuffs for the purpose. Therefore, M'Grath must have a key.

But would M'Grath do it? That remained to be seen; and since hesitation was no part of Griswold's equipment, he covered the fetters as well as he could with a scrap of bagging, and walked boldly down the levee and aboard the *Belle Julie*, falling into line with the returning file of roustabouts.

The mate was at the heel of the foot-plank, and he saw at once what the scrap of sacking was meant to hide.

"Hello, there, Gavitt!" he called, not less gruffly than of yore, but without the customary imprecation; "What are ye doing with thim things on?"

Griswold told a straight story, concealing nothing: not even the detective's refusal to tell him what he was arrested for.

M'Grath was smiling grimly when the tale was finished. "And did he let ye come back to collect yer day-pay, then?" he asked, ironically.

"Hardly. He shoved me into a cab and then went into a saloon to get a drink. While he was gone, the horses ran away and I got out," said Griswold, still adhering to the exact facts.

"Ye'd ought to find that cabby and buy him a seegyar," was the mate's comment. "So ye legged it, did ye?"

"Yes; when I got a show. But I can't get these things off."

This time M'Grath's smile was a grin.

"I'll bet ye can't. They ain't made f'r to come off. Never mind; peg along afther me. You did be doing me a good turn wan black night, and I'm not forgetting it."

He led the way up to his quarters in the texas, and telling Griswold to wait, went down on his knees to rummage in the locker beneath the berth.

"I've got a couple o' pair av thim things in here, somewhere, and maybe the key to 'em will fit yours," he went on, adding: "What's become av Mose?"

Again Griswold told the exact truth.

"The last I saw of him he was making a run for it up the levee, with one of the plain-clothes men chasing him."

M'Grath found his handcuffs and tried the key in those upon Griswold's wrists. It fitted.

"Now ye're fut- and hand-loose, I'll say to ye what I wouldn't say to a cripple. If ye've been telling me the truth, 'tis only the half av it. What have ye been doing, Gavitt?"

Griswold smiled. "Toting cargo on the *Belle*

Julie, since you've known me. You'd swear to that, wouldn't you?"

"But before that?"

"Loafing around New Orleans for a month or two."

The big mate pushed him to a seat on the after berth and sat down opposite.

"Because ye fished me out o' the river whin ye had good cause to lave me be, I'll tell ye a thing or two for the good av yer soul. Thing number wan is that ye're not Gavitt; ye're no more like him than I am. Let that go, an' come to thing number two; ye've been up to some deviltry. How do I know? Because, at the last landing below this a little man comes aboard an' spots you. Is that all? It is not. Whin the *Belle Julie* swings in, he's the first man off, making a clane jump av a good tin feet from the engine-room guards. I saw 'im."

Griswold nodded and said, "I was wondering how they came to place me so easily. This fellow knew I would be one of the two to carry out the spring line?"

"He did, f'r I told him."

"Meaning to get me pulled?"

"Meaning nothing but wanting to be rid av the bothering little man. He said he was a friend av yours, and didn't care to be speaking to ye while ye was mixing with the naygurs. But that's all over and gone. What'll ye be doing next?"

Griswold took a leaf out of the past. Safety in a former peril had grown out of a breakfast deliber-

ately eaten in a café next door to the Bayou State Security.

"What would I do but finish my job on the *Julie?*" he said, pushing the theory to its logical conclusion.

The mate shook his head. "Ye needn't do that; the cops might be coming down here and running you in again. How much pay have ye drawn?"

"Not any."

M'Grath took a greasy wallet from his pocket and counted out a deck-hand's wages for the trip.

"Take this, and I'll be getting it back from the clerk. It might not be good f'r ye to show up at the office. Where's yer hat?"

"It was lost in the shuffle out yonder at the mooring-ring."

The mate found an old one of his own, together with a long-tailed coat, much the worse for wear.

"Do you be taking these. They'll not be so likely to pick you up before ye can get up-town if ye look a little less like a hobo."

Griswold suffered a sudden return to the meliorating humanities.

"I've been calling you all the hard names I could lay tongue to, M'Grath, and there have been times when I would have given the price of a good farm for the privilege of standing up to you on a bit of green grass with nobody looking on. I take it all back. You say you haven't forgotten: neither will I forget, and maybe my turn will come again, some day."

"Go along with you," growled the rough-tongued

Irishman, whose very kindness had a tang of brutality in it. "If you're coming across the naygur, Mose, anywhere, sind him back and tell him I'll see that he gets real money f'r helping us unload. Off with ye, now, whilst they're catching up with yer runaway cab."

Griswold went leisurely, as befitted his theory, and upon reaching the levee, turned aside among the freight pyramids in search of his confederate. Now that there was time to recall the facts he feared that the negro had been taken. He had secured but a few yards' start in the race, and his pursuer was a white man, able to back speed with intelligence. Griswold had a sickening fit of despair when he contemplated the possibility of failure with the goal almost in sight; and the reaction, when he stumbled upon the negro skulking in the shadows of a lumber cargo, was sharp enough to make him faint and dizzy.

The negro did not recognize him at first and was about to run away when Griswold shook off the benumbing weakness and called out.

"T'ank de good Lawd! is dat you-all, Cap'm Gravitt? I's dat shuck up I couldn' recconize my ol' mammy! Tek dishyer cunjah-bag o' yourn 'fo' I gwine drap hit. Hit's des been *bu'nin'* my han's ev' sense I done tuk out wid it!"

Griswold took the handkerchief bundle, and the mere touch of it put new life into him.

"Where is the fellow who was chasing you, Mose?" he asked.

"I's nev' gwine tell you dat; no, suh. Las' time I seed him, he's des t'arin' off strips up de levee after turrer fellah."

"What other fellow?"

The negro laughed and did a double shuffle at the mere recollection of it.

"Hi-yah! Turrer fellah is de fellah what done tuk my job. Hit was des dis-a-way: when I t'ink dat white man gwine catch me, sho*ly*, I des drap down in de darkes' cawneh I kin fin'; dat's what I done, yas, suh. He des keep on agoin', *spat*, *spat*, *spat*, an' when he come out front de *Gineral Jackson* over yondeh, one dem boys what's wukkin' on her, *he* tuk out, an' dat white man des tu'n hisself loose an' mek his laigs go lak he gwine shek 'um plum off; yas, sah!"

Griswold suffered another lapse into the humanities when he saw the list of participants in his act growing steadily with each fresh complication, and he said, "I'm sorry for that, Mose."

"Nev' you min' 'bout dat, Cap'm. Dat boy he been doin' somepin to mek him touchous, 'less'n he nev' tuk out dat-a-way, no, suh!"

"Maybe so. Well, we can't help it now. Here is the other twenty I promised you."

"T'ank you, suh; t'ank you kin'ly Cap'm. You-all's des de whites' white man ev' I knowned. You sholy is."

"What are you going to do with yourself, now?" Griswold inquired.

"Who, me? I's gwine up yondeh to dat resteraw

an' git me de bigges' mess o' fried fish I kin hol'—dat's me; yas, suh."

"M'Grath says he'll pay you levee wages if you'll come back to the boat and help get the cargo out of her."

"Reckon I ain't gwine back to de *Julie:* no, suh. Dat'd be gittin' rich too fas' for dis niggeh. Good-night, Cap'm Gravitt; an' t'ank you kin'ly, suh."

Griswold went his way musing upon the little object-lesson afforded by the negro's determination. Here was a fellow man who was one of the feeblest of the under dogs in the great social fight; and with money enough in hand to give him at least a breathing interval, his highest ambition was a mess of fried fish.

The object-lesson was suggestive, if not specially encouraging, and Griswold made a mental note of it for further study when the question of present safety should be more satisfactorily answered.

XIII

GRISWOLD EMERGENT

HALF an hour or such a matter after the hue-and-cry runaway from the curb in front of the saloon two doors above, Mr. Abram Sonneschein, dealer in second-hand clothing and sweat-shop bargains, saw a possible customer drifting across the street, and made ready the grappling hooks of commercial enterprise.

The drifter was apparently a passenger from some lately arrived steamboat; but even to the trained eye of so acute an observer as Mr. Sonneschein he presented difficulties in the way of classification. Only temporarily, however. The long-tailed coat and the wide-brimmed, soft felt hat were the insignia of the down-river, back-country planter, and the merchant drew his conclusions accordingly.

"My, my! Rachel," he remarked to his helpmate behind the counter. "See dis chay from de back-voods across der street coming! Maype ve could sell him some odder t'ings to go vit dot coat, ain'd it? Come right in, *mein* frient; dis is der blace you vas looking for," this last to the drifter, with a detaining finger hooked persuasively into a buttonhole of the long-tailed coat.

So much for the grappling. But the possible cus-

tomer was not to be landed so easily. Twice and yet once again he broke away from the detaining finger; and when at last he finally allowed himself to be drawn into the garish, ill-smelling little shop, he proved to be discouragingly indifferent and hard to please in the matter of prices, hanging back and taking refuge in countrified reticence when Mr. Sonneschein's eloquence grew pathetically pressing.

"I did think maybe I'd buy me a suit of clothes," he admitted, finally, drawling the words to make his speech fit the countrified rôle, "but there isn't any hurry. I reckon I'll wait a spell and look around and see what kind of fashions they're wearing now."

This was a tacit acknowledgment that he had money to spend, and the eager merchant redoubled his efforts. His perseverance was rewarded, at length, and when the ship of bargain and sale was bowling merrily along before a fair breeze of suggestion, Mr. Sonneschein interlarded his solicitations with an account of the recent miscarriage of justice in front of the near-at-hand saloon.

The customer listened with apparent incuriosity, as one whom these doings in the city world touched but remotely; but the two or three questions he asked were nicely calculated to bring out the more important facts. The detectives had cautiously kept their own counsel as to the details of their quest. Mr. Sonneschein had gossiped with the policeman on the beat, and the policeman had talked with the red-faced man who had come alone in the cab, and had taken an unofficial drink with the roundsman before

going down to the steamboat landing. He and his "partner" were from New Orleans, and they were after a man who was wanted for big money: that was all he would tell the roundsman.

"I suppose they've caught him again long before this," said the hesitant customer, trying on a coat which might have been modelled upon a man twice his size, and surveying himself in the shop looking-glass while Mr. Sonneschein lovingly smoothed the lapels into place and gathered a generous handful of the surplus material at the back.

"I don't know if dey have—ain'd dot der elegantist fit in der vorld, now. See, Rachel; ain'd dot schplendit?"

"They didn't happen to mention the fellow's name, did they?" asked the prospective purchaser.

"Not much dey didn't! Dem dedectifs iss too schmart for dot. Dey don't give it avay when somepody else might got der rewards. How you like dot schplendit coat, now?"

"Seems tolerable big, doesn't it?" said the customer, whose speech still fitted his part to the final drawl. "Suppose we try something else. So there is a reward, is there?"

Mr. Sonneschein took the reward for granted and expressed a devout wish that he might be able to finger it. Whereupon the customer said he wished *he* might; and here the topic died a natural death and the business of buying and selling went on without further interruption.

There was little suggestion of the tramp roust-

about, and still less, perhaps, of the gentleman, about the person who presently emerged from the Sonneschein emporium. Nevertheless, he appeared to be well satisfied with his acquisitions, bearing himself as a purchaser who has by no means had the worse in the bargaining. At the first street corner he inquired his way of a policeman and was directed cityward. A square farther on he selected a barber's shop of cleanly promise, went in, tossed his newly acquired hand-bag to the porter, and took the first vacant chair.

"A hair-cut, a clean shave—not too close, and a bath afterward," was his laconic order; and a modest tip facilitated things and provided the little luxuries.

An hour later no one who had known him bearded and unkempt would have recognized the clean-shaven, athletic-looking young man who ran down the steps of the barber's shop and went swinging along on his way up-town. But the transformation was still incomplete. Reaching the retail district, he strolled purposefully up one street and down another, passing many brilliantly lighted shops until he found one exactly to his liking. A courteous salesman caught him up at the door, and led the way to the designated departments.

By this time Mr. Sonneschein's hesitant and countrified customer had undergone a complete metamorphosis. No longer reluctant and hard to please, he passed rapidly from counter to counter, making his selections with man-like celerity and certainty and bargaining not at all. When he was quite

through, there was enough to furnish a generous travelling wardrobe; a head-to-foot change of garmentings with a surplus to fill two lordly suit-cases; so he bought the suit-cases also, and had them taken with his other purchases, to the dressing-room.

Here, in quiet and great comfort, he made his second change of clothing, first carefully removing from each garment all the little tags and trade-marks which declared it St. Louis-bought. These tags, together with the Gavitt and the Sonneschein costumes, were crowded into the Sonneschein hand-bag, with the soiled red handkerchief to keep them company; and he was carrying this hand-bag when he reappeared to the waiting salesman.

"I see you have steam heat," he remarked. "Is your boiler-room accessible?"

"Yes, sir; it's in the basement," was the reply, and the courteous clerk wondered if his liberal customer were thinking of adding the heating plant to his purchases.

Griswold saw the wonder and smiled. "No; I don't want to buy it," he explained, with the exact touch of familiarity which bridges all chasms. "But I'm just up from the coast, where they have a good bit of fever the year round, and it's as well to be on the safe side. May I trouble you to show me the way?"

"Certainly," said the salesman, wondering no more; and when he had led the way to the boiler-room, and had seen his customer thrust the hand-bag well back among the coals in the furnace, he

thought it a worthy precaution and one which, if generally practiced, would considerably accelerate the clothing trade.

All traces of the deck-hand Gavitt, and of the Sonneschein planter-customer having been thus obliterated, there remained only the paying of his bill and the summoning of a cab. Oddly enough, the cab, when it came, proved to be a four-wheeler driven by a little, wizen-faced man whose thin, high-pitched voice was singularly familiar.

"The Hotel Chouteau?—yis, sorr. Will you plaze hand me thim grips? I can't lave me harrses."

The driver's excuse instantly tied the knot of recognition, and the man who had just cremated his former identities swore softly.

"Beg your pardon, sorr; was ye spakin' to me?"

"No; I was merely remarking that the world isn't as big as it might be."

"Faith, then, it's full big enough for a man wid a wife and sivin childer hangin' to um. Get in, sorr, and I'll have you at the Chouteau in t'ree shakes av a dead lamb's tail."

The little cabman was better than his word, but on the short drive to the hotel he found time to work out a small problem, not entirely to his satisfaction, but to at least a partial conclusion.

"'Tis the divil's own self he is, and there's nothing left av him but thim eyes and that scar on his forrud, and his manner of spakin'. But thim I'd swear to if I'd live to be as old as Father M'Guinness —rest his sowl."

XIV

PHILISTIA

All things considered, it was the Griswold of the college-graduate days—the days of the slender patrimony which had capitalized the literary beginning—who presented himself at the counter of the Hotel Chouteau at half-past nine o'clock on the evening of the *Belle Julie's* arrival at St. Louis, wrote his name in the guest-book, and permitted an attentive bell-boy to relieve him of his two suit-cases.

The clerk, a rotund little man with a promising bald spot and a permanent smile, had appraised his latest guest in the moment of book-signing, and the result was a small triumph for the Olive Street furnishing house. Next to the genuinely tailor-made stands the quality of verisimilitude; and the keynote of the clerk's greeting was respectful affability.

"Glad to have you with us, Mr. Griswold. Would you like a room, or a suite?"

Griswold was sufficiently human to roll the long-submerged courtesy prefix as a sweet morsel under his tongue. With a day to spare he might have clinched the clerk's respect by taking a suite; the more luxurious, the better. But St. Louis, with at least two men in it who would sweep the corners in

their search for him, was only a place to put behind him. So he said: "Neither; if I have time to get my supper and catch a train. Have you a railway guide?"

"There is one in the writing-room. But possibly I can tell you what you wish to know. Which way are you going?"

Without stopping to think of the critical happenings which had intervened since the forming of the impulsive resolution fixing his destination, Griswold named the chosen field for the hazard of fresh fortunes, and its direction.

"North; to a town in Minnesota called Wahaska. Do you happen to know the place?"

"I know it very well, indeed; southern Minnesota is my old stamping-ground. Are you acquainted in Wahaska?—but I know you are not, or you wouldn't pronounce it 'Wayhaska'."

"You are quite right; I know next to nothing about the town. But I have been given the impression that it is a quiet little place out of the beaten track, where a man might spend a summer without having to share it with a lot of other city runaways of his kind."

The clerk smiled and shook his head.

"You might have done that a few years ago, but there's a fine lake, you know, and some New Orleans people have built a resort house. I understand it does a pretty fair business in the season."

Having assured himself that the New Orleans leaf in his book of experience was safely turned and

securely pasted down, Griswold was nettled to find that the mere mention of the name sent creeping little chills of apprehension trickling up and down his spine. But innate stubbornness scoffed at the warning; derided and craved further details.

"How large a place is it?"

"Oh, four or five thousand, I should say; possibly more: big enough and busy enough so that a hundred-room resort house doesn't make it a souvenir town. It's a nice little city; modern, progressive, and business-like; trolleys, electric lights, and some manufacturing. Good people, too. *Front!* Check the gentleman's grips and show him the café. I'm sorry we can't give you dinner, but the dining-room closes at nine."

"Plenty of time, is there?" Griswold asked.

"Oh, yes; didn't I tell you? Your train leaves the Terminal at eleven-thirty; but you can get into the sleeper any time after eight o'clock."

The guest had crossed the lobby to the café, and the clerk was still dallying with the memories stirred up by the mention of his boyhood home, when a little man with weak eyes and a face that out-caricatured all the caricatures of the Irish, sidled up to the registry desk. The round-bodied clerk knew him and spoke in terms of accommodation.

"What is it, Patsy?"

"The young gentleman ye was spakin' to: is he gone?"

"He is in the café, getting his supper. What did you want of him?"

The weak-eyed little man was running a slow finger down the list of names on the guest-book, blinking as if the writing or the glare of the lights on the page dazzled him.

"I drove him, and he did be overpaying me, I think. What was ye saying his name would be?"

"It's right there, under your finger: Kenneth Griswold, New York."

"Um. And I wondher, now, where does he be living, whin he's at home?"

"I don't know; New York, I suppose, since he registers from there."

"And does he be staying here f'r awhile?"

"No; he is on his way to Minnesota."

"Um." A long pause followed in which the cab-man appeared to be counting the coins in his pocket by the sense of touch. Then: "Would yez be writing that down for me on a bit av paper, Misther Edwards?—his name, and the name av the place where he does be going, I mane?"

"So you can write to him and refund the overpayment after you've been to confession?" laughed the clerk. Nevertheless, he wrote the name and address on a card for the petitioner.

"Thank ye, sorr; thank ye kindly. Whin a man has a wife and sivin childer hangin' to um—" but here the singsong voice of the porter calling the Burlington westbound silenced all other sounds and the clerk heard no more.

Seated at a well-appointed table in the Chouteau café, Griswold had ample time to overtake himself

in the race reconstructive, and for the moment the point of view became frankly Philistine. The luxurious hotel, with its air of invincible respectability; the snowy napery, the cut glass, the shaded lights, the deferential service; all these appealed irresistibly to the epicurean in him. It was as if he had come suddenly to his own again after an undeserved season of deprivation, and the effect of it was to push the hardships and perils of the preceding weeks and months into a far-away past.

He ordered his supper deliberately, and while he waited for its serving, imagination cleared the stage and set the scenes for the drama of the future. That future, with all its opportunities for the realizing of ideals, was now safely assured. He could go whither he pleased and do what seemed right in his own eyes, and there was none to say him nay.

It was good to be able to pick and choose in a whole worldful of possibilities, and he gave himself a broad credit mark for persevering in the resolution which held him steadfastly to the modest, workaday plan struck out in the beginning. Apart from Miss Farnham's recognition of him on the *Belle Julie*—a recognition which, he persuaded himself, would never carry over from Gavitt the deck-hand to Griswold the student and benefactor of his kind—there was nothing to fear; no reason why he should not make Wahaska his workshop.

In this minor city of the clerk's describing he would find the environment most favorable for a re-writing of his book and for a renewal of his stud

ies. Here, too, he might hope to become by unostentatious degrees the beneficent god-in-the-car of his worthier ambition, raising the fallen, succoring the helpless, and fighting the battles of the oppressed.

Farther along, when she should have quite forgotten the *Belle Julie's* deck-hand, he would meet Miss Farnham on an equal social footing; and the conclusion of the whole matter should be a triumphant demonstration to her by their refutable logic of good deeds and a life well-lived that in his case, at least, the end justified the means.

Just here, however, there was an unresolved discord in the imaginative theme. It was struck by the reflection that since he could never take her fully into his confidence her approval would always lack the seal of completeness. She knew the masquerading deck-hand, and what he had done; and she would know Griswold the benefactor, and what he meant to do. But until she could link the two together, there could be no demonstration. Though he should build the bastion of good deeds mountain high, it could never figure as a bastion to her unless she might come to know what it was designed to defend.

Having a sensitive ear for the imaginative harmonies, the unresolved discord annoyed him. The effort to eliminate it brought him face to face with a blunt demand, a query that was almost psychic in its clear-cut distinctness. Why did these forecastings of the future always lead him up to the closed door of this young woman's approval and leave him there?

For one whose experience had all been bought on a rising market, Griswold was singularly heart-whole and normal in his attitude toward women. Beautiful women he had met before, among them a few who had lent themselves facilely to the idealizing process; but in each instance it was the artistic temperament, and not the heart, that was touched and inspired. Was Charlotte Farnham going to prove the exception? Since he could ask the question calmly and with no perceptible quickening of the pulses, he concluded that she was not. Nevertheless——

The train of reflective thought was broken abruptly by the seating of two other supper guests at his table; a big-framed man in the grizzled fifties, and a young woman who looked as if she might have stepped the moment before out of the fitting-rooms of the most famous of Parisian dressmakers.

Griswold's supper was served, and for a time he made shift to ignore the couple at the other end of the table. Then an overheard word, the name of the town which he had chosen as his future abiding place, made him suddenly observant.

It was the young woman who had named Wahaska, and he saw now that his first impression had been at fault; she was not overdressed. Also he saw that she was piquantly pretty; a bravura type, slightly suggesting the Rialto at its best, perhaps, but equally suggestive of sophistication, travel, and a serene disregard of chaperonage.

The young woman's companion was undeniably

her father. Gray, heavy-browed, and with a face that was a life-mask of crude strength and elemental shrewdness, the man had bequeathed no single feature to the alertly beautiful daughter; yet the resemblance was unmistakable. Griswold did not listen designedly, but he could not help overhearing much of the talk at the other end of the table. From it he gathered that the young woman was lately returned from some Florida winter resort; that her father had met her by appointment in St. Louis; and that the two were going on together; perhaps to Wahaska, since that was the place-name oftenest on the lips of the daughter.

Griswold was only moderately interested. The deliberately ordered supper, enticing in anticipation, had fallen short of the zestful promise in the fact. It came to him with a little shock that at least one part of him, the civilized appetite, had become debased by the plunge into the deck-hand depths, and he fought the suggestion fiercely. It was an article in his creed that environment is always subjective, and when one opens the door to an exception a host of ominous shapes may be ready to crowd in. He was fighting off the evil shapes while he listened; otherwise his interest might have been more acute.

It was at this point that the apex of Philistine contentment was passed and the reaction set in. He had been spending strength and vitality recklessly and the accounting was at hand. The descent began when he took himself sharply to task for the

high-priced supper. What right had he to order costly food that he could not eat when the price of this single meal would feed a family for a week?

After that, nothing that the obsequious and attentive waiter could bring proved tempting enough to recall the vanished appetite. Never having known what it was to be sick, Griswold disregarded the warning, drank a cup of strong coffee, and went out to the lobby to get a cigar, leaving his table companions in the midst of their meal. To his surprise and chagrin the carefully selected "perfecto" made him dizzy and faint, bringing a disquieting recurrence of the vertigo which had seized him while he was searching for his negro treasure-bearer on the levee.

"I've had an overdose of excitement, I guess," he said to himself, flinging the cigar away. "The best thing for me to do is to go down to the train and get to bed."

He went about it listlessly, with a curious buzzing in his ears and a certain dimness of sight which was quite disconcerting; and when a cab was summoned he was glad enough to let a respectfully sympathetic porter lend him a shoulder to the sidewalk.

The drive in the open air was sufficiently tonic to help him through the details of ticket-buying and embarkation; and afterward sleep came so quickly that he did not know when the Pullman porter drew the curtains to adjust the screen in the window at his feet, though he did awake drowsily later on at the sound of voices in the aisle, awoke to realize

vaguely that his two table companions of the Hotel Chouteau café were to be his fellow travellers in the Pullman.

The train was made up ready to leave, and the locomotive was filling the great train-shed with stertorous hissings, when a red-faced man slipped through the gates to saunter over to the Pullman and to peck inquisitively at the porter.

"Much of a load to-night, George?"

"No, sah; mighty light: four young ladies goin' up to de school in Faribault, Mistah Grierson and his daughter, and a gentleman from de Chouteau."

"A gentleman from the Chouteau? When did he come down?"

The porter knew the calling of the red-faced man only by intuition; but Griswold's tip was warming in his pocket and he lied at random and on general principles.

"Been heah all de evenin'; come down right early afte' suppeh, and went to baid like he was sick or tarr'd or somethin'."

"What sort of a looking man is he?"

"Little, smooth-faced, narr'–chisted gentleman; look like he might be——"

But the train was moving out and the red-faced man had turned away. Whereupon the porter broke his simile in the midst, picked up his carpet-covered step, and climbed aboard.

XV

THE GOTHS AND VANDALS

In the day of its beginnings, Wahaska was a minor trading-post on the north-western frontier, and an outfitting station for the hunters and trappers of the upper Mississippi and Minnesota lake region.

Later, it became the market town of a wheat-growing district, and a foundation of modest prosperity was laid by well-to-do farmers gravitating to their county seat to give their children the benefit of a graded school. Later still came the passing of the wheat, a re-peopling of the farms by a fresh influx of home-seekers from the Old World, and the birth, in Wahaska and elsewhere, of the industrial era.

Jasper Grierson was a product of the wheat-growing period. The son of one of the earliest of the New-York-State homesteaders in the wheat belt, he came of age in the year of the Civil War draft, and was unpatriotic enough, some said, to dodge conscription, or the chance of it, by throwing up his hostler's job in a Wahaska livery stable and vanishing into the dim limbo of the Farther West. Also, tradition added that he was well-spared by most; that he was ill-spared, indeed, by only one, and that one a woman.

After the westward vanishing, Wahaska saw him no more until he returned in his vigorous prime, a veteran soldier of fortune upon whom the goddess had poured a golden shower out of some cornucopia of the Colorado mines. Although rumor, occasionally naming him during the years of absence, had never mentioned a wife, he was accompanied by a daughter, a dark-eyed, red-lipped young woman, a rather striking beauty of a type unfamiliar to Wahaska and owing nothing, it would seem, to the grim, gray-wolf Jasper.

With the return to his birthplace, Jasper Grierson began a campaign, the planning of which had tided him over many an obstacle in the road to fortune. It had given him the keenest thrill of joy of which a frankly sordid nature is capable to descend upon his native town rich enough to buy and sell any round dozen of the well-to-do farmers; and when he had looked about him he settled down to the attainment of his heart's desire, which was to have the casting vote in the business affairs of the community which had once known him as a helper in a livery stable.

Losing sight of the irresistible energy and momentum of wealth as wealth, men said that fortune favored him from the outset. It was only a half-truth, but it sufficed to account for what was really a campaign of conquest. Grierson's touch was Midas-like, turning all things to gold; and even in Wahaska there were Mammon worshippers enough to hail him as a public benefactor whose wealth and

enterprise would shortly make of the overgrown village a town, and of the town a thriving city.

Since the time was ripe, Wahaska did presently burst its swaddling-bands. Commercial enterprise is sheep-like; where one leads, others will follow; and the mere following breeds success, if only by the sheer impetus of the massed forward movement. Jasper Grierson was the man of the hour, but the price paid for leadership by the led is apt to be high. When Wahaska became a city, with a charter and a bonded debt, electric lights, water-works, and a trolley system, Grierson's interest predominated in every considerable business venture in it, save and excepting the Raymer Foundry and Machine Works.

He was the president of one bank, and the principal stockholder in the other, which was practically an allied institution; he was the sole owner of the grain elevator, the saw- and planing-mills, the box factory, and a dozen smaller industries in which his name did not appear. Also, it was his money, or rather his skill as a promoter, which had transformed the Wahaska & Pineboro Railroad from a logging switch, built to serve the saw-mill, into an important and independent connecting link in the great lake region system.

In each of these commercial or industrial chariots the returned native sat in the driver's seat; and those who remembered him as a loutish young farm-hand overlooked the educative results of continued success and marvelled at his gifts, wondering how and where he had acquired them.

While the father was thus gratifying a purely Gothic lust for conquest, the daughter figured, in at least one small circle, as a beautiful young Vandal, with a passion for overturning all the well-settled traditions. At first her attitude toward Wahaska and the Wahaskans had been serenely tolerant; the tolerance of the barbarian who neither understands, nor sympathizes with, the homely virtues and the customs which have grown out of them. Then resentment awoke, and with it a soaring ambition to reconstruct the social fabric of the countrified town upon a model of her own devising.

In this charitable undertaking she was aided and abetted by her father, who indulgently paid the bills. At her instigation he built an imposing red brick mansion on the sloping shore of Lake Minnedaska, named it—or suffered her to name it—"Mereside," had an artist of parts up from Chicago to design the decorations and superintend the furnishings, had a landscape gardener from Philadelphia to lay out the grounds, and, when all was in readiness, gave a house-warming to which the invitations were in some sense mandatory, since by that time he had a finger in nearly every commercial and industrial pie in Wahaska.

After the house-warming, which was a social event quite without precedent in Wahaskan annals, Miss Grierson's leadership was tacitly acknowledged by a majority of the ex-farmers' wives and daughters, though they still discussed her with more or less frankness in the sewing-circles and at neighborhood

tea-drinkings. Crystallized into accusation, there was little to be urged against her save that she was pretty and rich, and that her leaning toward modernity was sometimes a little startling. But being human, the missionary seamstresses and the tea-drinkers made the most of these drawbacks, whetting criticism to a cutting edge now and then with curious speculations about Margery's mother, and wondering why Jasper Grierson or the daughter never mentioned her.

Meanwhile, the big house on the lake front continued to set the social pace. Afternoon teas began to supersede the sewing-circles; not a few of the imitators attained to the formal dignity of visiting cards with "Wednesdays" or "Thursdays" appearing in neat script in the lower left-hand corner; and in some of the more advanced households the principal meal of the day drifted from its noontide anchorage to unwonted moorings among the evening hours—greatly to the distress of the men, for whom even hot weather was no longer an excuse for appearing in shirt-sleeves.

For these innovations Miss Grierson was indirectly, though not less intentionally, responsible; and her satisfaction was in just proportion to the results attained. But in spite of these successes there were still obstacles to be surmounted. From the first there had been a perverse minority refusing stubbornly to bow the head in the house of—Grierson. The Farnhams were of it, and the Raymers, with a following of a few of the families called "old" as

age is reckoned in the Middle West. The men of this minority were slow to admit the omnipotence of Jasper Grierson's money, and the women were still slower to accept Miss Grierson on terms of social equality.

At the house-warming this minority had been represented only by variously worded regrets. At a reception, given to mark the closing of Mereside, socially, on the eve of Miss Margery's departure for the winter in Florida, the regrets were still polite and still unanimous. Miss Margery laughed defiantly and set her white teeth on a determined resolution to reduce this inner citadel of conservatism at all costs. Accordingly, she opened the campaign on the morning after the reception; began it at the breakfast-table when she was pouring her father's coffee.

"You know everybody, and everybody's business, poppa: who is the treasurer of St. John's?" she inquired.

"How should I know?" grumbled the magnate, whose familiarity with church affairs was limited to certain writings of a legal nature concerning the Presbyterian house of worship upon which he held a mortgage.

"You ought to know," asserted Miss Margery, with some asperity. "Isn't it Mr. Edward Raymer?"

Jasper Grierson frowned thoughtfully into space. "Why, yes; come to think of it, I guess he is the man. Anyway, he's one of their—what do you call 'em—trustees?"

"Wardens," corrected Margery.

"Yes, that's it; I knew it was something connected with a penitentiary. What do you want of him?"

"Nothing much of him: but I want a check for five hundred dollars payable to his order."

Jasper Grierson's laugh was suggestive of the noise made by a rusty door-hinge. The tilting of the golden cornucopia had made him a ruthless money-grubber, but he never questioned his daughter's demands.

"Going in for the real old simon-pure, blue-ribbon brand of respectability this time, ain't you Madgie?" he chuckled; but he wrote the check on the spot.

Two hours later, Miss Grierson's cutter, driven by herself, paraded in Main Street to the delight of any eye æsthetic. The clean-limbed, high-bred Kentuckian, the steel-shod, tulip-bodied vehicle, and the faultlessly arrayed young woman tucked in among the costly fur lap robes were three parts of a harmonious whole; and more than one pair of eyes looked, and turned to look again; with envy if they were young eyes and feminine; with frank admiration if they were any age and masculine. For Miss Grierson, panoplied for conquest, was the latest reincarnation of the woman who has been turning men's heads and quickening the blood in their veins since that antediluvian morning when the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair.

Miss Margery drove daily in good weather, but on this crisp January morning her outing had an objective other than the spectacular. When the clean-

limbed Kentuckian had measured the length of Main Street, he was sent on across the railroad tracks into the industrial half of the town, and was finally halted in front of the Raymer Foundry and Machine Works.

Raymer was at his desk when the smart equipage drew up before the office door; and a moment later he was at the curb, bareheaded, offering to help the daughter of men out of the robe wrappings.

"Perhaps I'd better not get out," she said. "Duke doesn't stand well. Can I see Mr. Edward Raymer for a minute or two?"

Raymer bowed and blushed a little. He knew her so well, by eye-intimacy at least, that he had been sure she knew him in the same way—as indeed she did.

"I—that is my name. What can I do for you, Miss Grierson?"

"Oh, *thank* you," she burst out, with exactly the proper shade of impulsiveness. "Do you know, I was really afraid I might have to introduce myself? I——"

The interruption was of Raymer's making. One of his employees appearing opportunely, he sent the man to the horse's head, and once more held out his hands to Miss Grierson.

"You must come in and get warm," he insisted. "I am sure you have found it very cold driving this morning. Let me help you."

She made a driver's hitch in the reins and let him lift her to the sidewalk. The ease with which he

did it gave her a pleasant little thrill of the sort that comes with the realization of a thing hoped for. When she was not too busy with the social triumphs, strength, manly strength, was a passion with Miss Grierson.

Raymer held the office door open for her, and in the grimy little den which had been his father's before him, placed a chair for her at the desk-end.

"Now you can tell me in comfort what I can do for you," he said, bridging the interruption.

"Oh, it's only a little thing. I came to see you about renting a pew in St. John's; that is our church, you know."

Raymer did not know, but he was politic enough not to say so.

"I am quite at your service," he hastened to say. "Shall I show you a plan of the sittings?"

She protested prettily that it wasn't at all necessary; that any assignment agreeable to him and least subversive of the rights and preferences of others would be quite satisfactory. But he got out the blue-print plan and dusted it, and in the putting together of heads over it many miles in the gap of unacquaintance were safely and swiftly flung to the rear.

When the sittings were finally decided upon she opened her purse.

"It is so good of you to take time from your business to wait on me," she told him; and then, in naïve confusion: "I—I asked poppa to make out a check, but I don't know whether it is big enough."

Raymer took the order to pay, glanced at the amount, and from that to the velvety eyes with the half-abashed query in them. Miss Grierson's eyes were her most effective weapon. With them she could look anything, from daggers drawn to kisses. Just now the look was of child-like beseeching, but Raymer withstood it—or thought he did.

"It is more than twice as much as we get for the best locations," he demurred. "Wait a minute and I'll write you a check for the difference and give you a receipt."

But at the word she was on her feet in an eager flutter of protest.

"Oh, please don't!" she pleaded. "If it is really too much, can't you put the difference in the missionary box, or in the—in the rector's salary?—as a little donation from us, you know?"

Then Edward Raymer found that he had not withstood the eye-attack and he surrendered at discretion, compromising on a receipt for the pew-rent. Thus the small matter of business was concluded; but Miss Margery was not yet ready to go. From St. John's and its affairs official she passed deftly to the junior warden of St. John's and his affairs personal. Was the machine works the place where they made steam-engines and things? And did the sign, "No Admittance," on the doors mean that no visitors were allowed? If not, she would so much like to——

Raymer smiled and put himself once more at her service, this time as guide and megaphonist. It was

all very noisy and grimy, but if she cared to go through the works he would be glad to go with her.

He did not know how glad he was going to be until they had passed through the clamorous machine-shop and had reached the comparatively quiet foundry. One of Miss Margery's gifts was the ability to become for the moment an active and sympathetic sharer in any one's enthusiasms. In the foundry she looked and listened, and was unsophisticated only to the degree that invites explanation. It was a master-stroke of finesse. A man is never so transparent as when he forgets himself in his own trade-talk; and Raymer was unrolling himself as a scroll for Miss Grierson to read as she ran.

"And you say that is one of the columns for poppa's new block?" she asked, while they stood to watch the workmen drawing a pattern out of the sand of the mould.

"No; that is the pattern: that is wood, and it is used to make the print in the sand into which the melted iron is poured. This part of the mould they are lifting with the crane is called the 'cope,' and the lower half is the 'drag.' When they have drawn the patterns, they will lock the two halves together and the mould will be ready for the pouring. You ought to come some afternoon while we are pouring; it would interest you if you've never seen it."

"Oh, may I? I shall remember that, when I come back from Florida."

"You are going away?" he said quickly.

"Yes; for a few weeks."

"Wahaska will miss you."

"Will it? I wish I could believe that, Mr. Raymer. But I don't know. Sometimes——"

"You mustn't doubt it for a moment. When you drove up a few minutes ago I was thinking that you were the one bit of redeeming color in our rather commonplace picture."

She let him look into what she wished him to believe were the very ultimate depths of the velvety eyes when she said: "You shouldn't flatter, Mr. Raymer. For one thing, you don't do it easily; and for another, it's disappointing."

They were passing out of the foundry on their way back to the office and he held the weighted door open for her.

"A bit of honest praise isn't flattery," he protested. "But supposing it were a mere compliment —why should you find it disappointing?"

"Because one has to have anchors of some sort; anchors in sincerity and straightforwardness, in the honesty of purpose that will say, '*No-no!*' and slap the best-beloved baby's hands, if that's what is needed. That is your proper rôle, Mr. Raymer, and you must never hesitate to take it."

It was the one small lapse from the strict conventionalities, but it sufficed to cut out all the middle distances. The tour of the works which had begun in passing acquaintance ended in friendship, precisely as Miss Grierson had meant it should; and when Raymer was tucking her into the cutter and wrapping her in the fur robes, she added the finish-

ing touch, or rather the touch for which all the other touches had been the preliminaries.

"I'm so glad I had the courage to come and see you this morning. We have been dreadfully remiss in church matters, but I am going to try to make up for it in the future. I'm sorry you couldn't come to us last evening. Please tell your mother and sister that I *do* hope we'll meet, sometime. I should so dearly love to know them. Thank you so much for everything. Good-by."

Raymer watched her as she drove away, noted her skilful handling of the fiery Kentuckian and her straight seat in the flying cutter, and the smile which a day or two earlier might have been mildly satirical was now openly approbative.

"She is a shrewd little strategist," was his comment; "but all the same she is a mighty pretty girl, and as good and sensible as she is shrewd. I wonder why mother and Gertrude haven't called on her?"

Having thus mined the Raymer outworks, Miss Grierson next turned her batteries upon the Farnhams. They were Methodists, and having learned that the doctor's hobby was a struggling mission work in Pottery Flat, Margery called the paternal check-book again into service, and the cutter drew up before the doctor's office in Main Street.

"Good-morning, doctor," she began cheerfully, bursting in upon the head of the First-Church board of administrators as a charming embodiment of youthful enthusiasm, "I'm running errands for poppa this morning. Mr. Rodney was telling us about

that little First-Church mission in Pottery Flat, and poppa wanted to help. But we are not Methodists, you know, and he was afraid—that is, he didn't quite know how you might——"

It was an exceedingly clever bit of acting, and the good doctor capitulated at once, discrediting, for the first time in his life, the intuition of his home womankind.

"Now that is very thoughtful and kind of you, Miss Margery," he said, wiping his glasses and looking a second time at the generous figure of the piece of money-paper. "I appreciate it the more because I know you must have a great many other calls upon your charity. We've been wanting to put a trained worker in charge of that mission for I don't know how long, and this gift of yours makes it possible."

"The kindness is in allowing us to help," murmured the small diplomat. "You'll let me know when more is needed? Promise me that, Doctor Farnham."

"I shouldn't be a good Methodist if I didn't," laughed the doctor. Then he remembered the Mereside reception and the regrets, and was moved to make amends. "I'm sorry we couldn't be neighborly last night; but my sister-in-law is very frail, and Charlotte doesn't go out much. They are both getting ready to go to Pass Christian, but I'm sure they'll call before they go South."

"I shall be ever so glad to welcome them," purred Miss Margery, "and I do hope they will come before I leave. I'm going to Palm Beach next week, you know."

"I'll tell them," volunteered the doctor. "They'll find time to run in, I'm sure."

But for some reason the vicarious promise was not kept; and the Raymers held aloof; and the Oswalds and the Barrs relinquished the new public library project when it became noised about that Jasper Grierson and his daughter were moving in it.

Miss Margery possessed her soul in patience up to the final day of her home staying, and the explosion might have been indefinitely postponed if, on that last day, the Raymers, mother and daughter, had not pointedly taken pains to avoid her at the *lingerie* counter in Thorwalden's. It was as the match to the fuse, and when Miss Grierson left the department store there were red spots in her cheeks and the dark eyes were flashing.

"They think I'm a jay!" she said, with a snap of the white teeth. "They need a lesson, and they're going to get it before I leave. I'm not going to sing small all the time!"

It was surely the goddess of discord who ordained that the blow should be struck while the iron was hot. Five minutes afte the rebuff in Thorwalden's, Miss Grierson met Raymer as he was coming out of the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank. There was an exchange of commonplaces, bu in the midst of it Miss Margery broke off abruptly to say: "Mr. Raymer, please tell me what I have done to offend your mother and sister."

If she had been in the mood to compromise, half of the deferred payment of triumph might have been

discharged on the spot by Raymer's blundering attempt at disavowal.

"Why, Miss Margery! I don't know—that is—er—really, you must be mistaken, I'm sure!"

"I am not mistaken, and I'd like to know," she persisted, looking him hardily in the eyes. "It must be something I have been doing, and if I can find out what it is, I'll reform."

Raymer got away as soon as he could; and when the opportunity offered, was besotted enough to repeat the question to his mother and sister. Mrs. Raymer was a large and placid matron of the immovable type, and her smile emphasized her opinion of Miss Grierson.

"The mere fact of her saying such a thing to you ought to be a sufficient answer, I should think," was her mild retort.

"I don't see why," Raymer objected.

"What would you think if Gertrude did such a thing?"

"Oh, well; that is different. In the first place Gertrude wouldn't do it, and——"

"Precisely. And Miss Grierson shouldn't have done it. It is because she can do such things that a few of us think she wouldn't be a pleasant person to know, socially."

"But why?" insisted Raymer, with masculine obtuseness.

It was his sister who undertook to make the reason plain to him.

"It isn't anything she does, or doesn't do, particu-

larly; it is the atmosphere in which she lives and moves and has her being. If it weren't for her father's money, she would be—well, it is rather hard to say just what she would be. But she always makes me think of the bonanza people—the pick and shovel one day and a million the next. I believe she is a frank little savage, at heart."

"I don't," the brother contended, doggedly. "She may be a trifle new and fresh for Wahaska, but she is clever and bright, and honest enough to ignore a social code which makes a mock of sincerity and a virtue of hypocrisy. I like her all the better for the way she flared out at me. There isn't one young woman in a thousand who would have had the nerve and the courage to do it."

"Or the impudence," added Mrs. Raymer, when her son had left the room. Then: "I do hope Edward isn't going to let that girl come between him and Charlotte!"

The daughter laughed.

"I should say there is room for a regiment to march between them, as it is. Miss Gilman took particular pains to let him know what train they were leaving on, and I happen to know he never went near the station to tell them good-by."

XVI

GOOD SAMARITANS

SINCE she had undertaken to show Wahaska precisely how to deport itself in the conventional field, Miss Grierson took a maid and a chaperon with her when she went to Florida. But when she returned in April, the maid had been left behind to marry the gamekeeper of one of the millionaire estates on Lake Worth, and little Miss Matthews, the ex-seamstress chaperon, had been dropped off in Illinois to visit relatives.

This is how it chanced that Margery, unwilling to set the Wahaskans a bad example, had telegraphed her father to meet her in St. Louis. Also, it shall account as it may for the far-reaching stroke of fate which seated the Griersons at Griswold's table in the Hotel Chouteau café, and afterward made them his fellow travellers in the north-bound sleeping-car *Anita*.

When Jasper Grierson travelled alone he was democratic enough to be satisfied with a section in the body of the car. But when Margery's tastes were to be consulted, the drawing-room was none too good. Indeed, as it transpired on the journey northward from St. Louis, the *Anita's* drawing-room proved to be not good enough.

"It is simply a crude insult, the way they wear out their old, broken-down cars on us up here!" she was protesting to her father, when they came back from the late dining-car breakfast. "You ought to do something about it." Miss Margery was at the moment fresh from "Florida Specials" and the solid-Pullman vestibuled luxuries of eastern winter travel.

Jasper Grierson's smile was a capitalistic acquirement, and some of his fellow-townsmen described it as "cast-iron." But for his daughter it was always indulgent.

"I don't own the railroad yet, Madgie; you'll have to give me a little more time," he pleaded, clipping the tip from a black cigar of heroic proportions and reaching for the box of safety matches.

"I'll begin now, if you are going to smoke that dreadful thing in this stuffy little den," was the unfilial retort; and the daughter found a magazine and exchanged the drawing-room with its threat of asphyxiation for a seat in the body of the car.

For a little while the magazine, or rather the pictures in it, sufficed for a time-killer. Farther along, the panorama of eastern Iowa unrolling itself beside the path of the train served as an alternative to the pictured pages. When both the book and the outdoor prospect palled upon her, Miss Margery tried to interest herself in her immediate surroundings.

The material was not promising. Two old ladies dozing in the section diagonally across the aisle, four school-girls munching chocolates and restlessly shifting from seat to seat in the farther half of the car,

and the conductor methodically making out his reports in the section opposite, summed up the human interest, or at least the visible part of it. Half-way down the car one of the sections was still curtained and bulkheaded; and when Miss Grierson curled up in her seat and closed her eyes she was wondering vaguely why the porter had left this one section undisturbed in the morning scene-shifting.

The northward-flying train was crossing a river, and the dining-car waiter was crying the luncheon summons, when Margery awoke to realize the comforting fact that she had successfully slept the forenoon away. With the eye-opening came a recurrence of the last-remembered waking thought—the wonder why the curtained section was still undisturbed. When she was leaving the *Anita* with her father, the explanation suggested itself: of course, the occupant of the middle section must be ill.

Luncheon over, there was nothing to remind her of the probable invalid in Number Six until late in the afternoon when, looking through the open door of the drawing-room, she saw the porter carrying a glass of water to the invisible sufferer. Quite suddenly her interest became acute. Who was the sick one? and why was he, or she, travelling without an attendant?

With Margery Grierson, to question was to ascertain; and the Pullman conductor, once more checking his diagrams in Section Eleven, offered the readiest means of enlightenment. A few minutes later Margery rejoined her father in the private compartment.

"Do you remember the nice-looking young man who sat at the table with us in the Chouteau last night?" she began abruptly.

The gray-wolf Jasper nodded. He had an excellent memory for faces.

"What did you think of him?" The query followed the nod like a nimble boxer's return blow.

"I thought he paid a whole lot more attention to you than he did to his supper. Why?"

"He is on this car; sick with a fever of some kind, and out of his head. He is going to Wahaska."

"How do you know it's the same one?"

"I made the conductor take me to see him. He talked to me in Italian and called me '*Carlotta mia.*'"

"Humph! he didn't look like a dago."

"He isn't; it's just because he is delirious."

There was a long pause, broken finally by a curt "Well?" from the father.

"I've been thinking," was the slow response. "Of course, there is a chance that he has friends in Wahaska, and that some one will be at the train to meet him. But it is only a chance."

"Why doesn't the conductor telegraph ahead and find out?"

"He doesn't know the man's name. I tried to get him to look for a card, or to break into the suit-cases under the berth, but he says the regulations won't let him."

"Well?" said the father again, this time with a more decided upward inflection. Then he added:

"You've made up your mind what you're going to do: say it."

Margery's decision was announced crisply. "There is no hospital to send him to—which is Wahaska's shame. Maybe he will be met and taken care of by his friends: if he is, well and good; if he isn't, we'll put him in the carriage and take him home with us."

The cast-iron smile with the indulgent attachment wrinkled frostily upon Jasper Grierson's heavy face.

"The Good Samaritan act, eh? I've known you a long time, Madgie, but I never can tell when you're going to break out in a brand-new spot. Didn't lose any of your unexpectedness in Florida, did you?"

Miss Margery tossed her pretty head, and the dark eyes snapped.

"Somebody in the family has to think of something besides making money," she retorted. "Please lend me your pencil; I want to do some wiring."

All other gifts apart, Miss Grierson could boast of a degree of executive ability little inferior to her father's; did boast of it when the occasion offered; and by the time the whistle was sounding for Wahaska, all the arrangements had been made for the provisional rescue of the sick man in Lower Six.

At the station a single inquiry served to give the Good Samaritan intention the right of way. There were no friends to meet Lower Six; but the Grierson carriage was waiting, with the coachman and a Mereside gardener for bearers. From that to putting the sick man to bed in one of the guest-chambers

of the lake-fronting mansion at the opposite end of the town was a mere bit of routine for one so capable as Miss Grierson; and twenty minutes after the successful transfer, she had Dr. Farnham at the nameless one's bedside, and was telephoning the college infirmary for a nurse.

Naturally, there were explanations to be made when the doctor came down. To her first anxious question the answer came gravely: "You have a very sick man on your hands, Miss Margery." Then the inevitable: "Who is he?"

She spread her hands in a pretty affectation of embarrassment.

"What will you think of me, Doctor Farnham, when I tell you that I haven't the littlest atom of an idea?"

Charlotte's father was a small man, with kindly eyes and the firm, straight-lined mouth of his Puritan forebears. "Tell me about it," he said concisely.

"There is almost nothing to tell. He was sick and out of his head, and his ticket read to Wahaska. No one on the train seemed to know anything about him; and he couldn't tell us anything himself. So when we found there was no one to meet him at the station, we put him into the carriage and brought him home. There didn't seem to be anything else to do."

A shrewd smile flickered for an instant in the kindly eyes of Wahaska's best-beloved physician.

"Almost any one else would have found plenty

of other things to do—or not to do," was his comment. "Are you prepared to go on, Miss Margery?"

"Taking care of him until he is able to take care of himself?—certainly," was the quick reply.

"Then I'll tell you that it is likely to be a long siege, and probably a pretty serious one. I can't tell positively without the microscope, but I'm calling it malaria, with complications. There seems to be a general break-down, as if he had been overworking or starving himself. You'll need help."

"I know; I've just been 'phoning the college, but they can't spare anybody out of the infirmary. Find me some one, doctor."

Dr. Farnham took time to think.

"Let me see: you'll need a good, strong fellow who can be patient and kind and inflexible and even brutal, by turns. I wonder if we couldn't get Sven Oleson? The Raymers had him when Edward was down with typhoid, and he was a treasure when we could make him understand what was wanted."

There were fine little lines coming and going between Miss Margery's straight black brows. "We needn't do it by halves, doctor," she said decisively. "If it would be better to wire St. Paul or Minneapolis and get a trained nurse——"

"—You'd stand the extra expense, of course," laughed the doctor. "You are all the world's good angel when you set out to be, Miss Margery. But it won't be necessary; Oleson will do, if I can get him. And I'll send him or somebody else before bedtime. Meanwhile, there's nothing to do but to

keep your patient quiet; and he'll do that for himself for a few hours. I gave him a bit of an anodyne before I came down."

Margery went to the outer door with her kindly counsellor, playing the part of the gracious hostess as one who is, or who means to be, precisely letter-perfect.

"It will soon be time for your daughter and Miss Gilman to come home, won't it, doctor?" she asked.

"Yes. I had a letter from Charlotte to-day. They are coming by boat to Winona, and they should have left St. Louis this morning." Then, to match the neighborly interest: "You are looking extremely well, Miss Margery. Your few weeks in Florida were pleasant ones, I know."

"Yes; they were pleasant. But I'm always well. Has poppa been working himself to death while I've been away?"

There was the faintest glimmer of an amused smile in the doctor's eyes when he said: "No, not quite, I guess. He has been out here with the masons and carpenters who are building the stables, every fine day, I think, and that was by way of being a recreation for him."

Margery nodded brightly. "I thought perhaps he would do that if I went away. But I mustn't keep you. Be sure and telephone me about Sven. I'll send the cart after him if you tell me to."

The doctor promised; and after he was gone, she went slowly up-stairs and let herself softly into the room of shaded lights. The sick man was resting

quietly, and he did not stir when she crossed to the bed and laid a cool palm on his forehead.

"You poor castaway!" she murmured. "I wonder who you are, and to whom you belong? I suppose somebody has got to be mean and sneaky and find out. Would you rather it would be I than some one else who might care even less than I do?"

The sleeping man opened unseeing eyes and closed them again heavily. "I found the money, *Carlotta mia;* you didn't know that, did you?" he muttered; and then the narcotic seized and held him again.

His clothes were on a chair, and when she had carried them to a light that could be shaded completely from the bed and its occupant, she searched the pockets one by one. It was a little surprising to find all but two of them quite empty; no cards, no letters, no pen, pencil, pocket-knife, or purse; nothing but a handkerchief, and in one pocket of the waistcoat a small roll of paper money, a few coins and two small keys.

She held the coat up to the electric and examined it closely; the workmanship, the trimmings. It was not tailor-made, she decided, and by all the little signs and tokens it was quite new. And the same was true of the other garments. But there was no tag or trade-mark on any of them to show where they came from.

Failing to find the necessary clew to the castaway's identity in this preliminary search, she went on resolutely, dragging the two suit-cases over to the

lighted corner and unlocking them with the keys taken from the pocket of the waistcoat.

The first yielded nothing but clothing, all new and evidently unworn. The second held more clothing, a man's toilet appliances, also new and unused, but apparently no scrap of writing or hint of a name. With a little sigh of bafflement she took the last tightly rolled bundle of clothing from the suit-case. While she was lifting it a pistol fell out.

In times past, Jasper Grierson's daughter had known weapons and their faults and excellences. "That places him—a little," she mused, putting the pistol aside after she had glanced at it: "He's from the East; he doesn't know a gun from a piece of common hardware."

Further search in the tightly rolled bundle was rewarded by the discovery of a typewritten book manuscript, unsigned, and with it an oblong packet wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. She slipped the string and removed the wrapping. The brick-shaped packet proved to be a thick block of bank-notes held together by heavy rubber bands snapped over the ends.

While the little ormolu clock on the dressing-case was whirring softly and chiming the hour she stared at the money-block as if the sight of it had fascinated her. Then she sprang up and flew to the door, not to escape, but to turn the key noiselessly in the lock. Secure against interruption, she pulled the rubber bands from the packet. The block was built up in layers, each layer banded with a paper slip on which

was printed in red the name of the certifying bank and the amount. "Bayou State Security, $5,000." There were twenty of these layers in all, nineteen of them unbroken. But through the printed figures on the twentieth a pen-stroke had been drawn, and underneath was written "$4,000."

Quite coolly and methodically Margery Grierson verified the bank's count as indicated by the paper bands. There were one hundred thousand dollars, lacking the one thousand taken from the broken packet. The counting completed, she replaced the rubber bands and the brown-paper wrapping. Then she repacked the suit-cases, arranging the contents as nearly as might be just as she had found them, locking the cases and returning the keys to the waistcoat pocket from which she had taken them.

When all was done, she tiptoed across to the bed, with the brown-paper packet under her arm. The sick man stirred uneasily and began to mutter again. She bent to catch the words, and when she heard, the light of understanding leaped swiftly into the dark eyes. For the mumbled words were the echo of a fierce threat: "Sign it: sign it *now*, or, by God, I'll shoot to kill!"

XVII

GROPINGS

THE robbery of the Bayou State Security Bank was already an old story when Mr. Matthew Broffin, chief of the New Orleans branch of a notable detective agency, returned from Gautemala with the forger Mortsen as his travelling companion.

Broffin was a successful man in his calling. Beginning as a deputy marshal in the "moonshining" districts of Kentucky and Tennessee, he had shifted first to the Secret Service, and later to the more highly specialized ranks of the private agencies. With nothing very spectacular to his credit, he had earned repute as a follower of long trails, and as an acute unraveller of tangled clews. Hence, his docket was never empty.

It was not altogether for the sake of the reward that he took over the case of the bank robbery a few days after his return from Central America. As a matter of fact, there was an express-company case waiting which promised more money. But emulation counts for something, even in the thief-catching field; and since two members of his own staff had fired and missed their mark in St. Louis, there was a blunder to be retrieved.

Reasoning logically upon the new problem, Broffin did not at once try to take up the chase at the point to which it had been carried by the two who had failed. Since the man had disappeared, the first necessity was the establishing of his true identity, and for a week Broffin devoted himself to the task of disentangling the two personalities: that of the decently dressed, parlor-anarchist bank-raider, and that of the man who figured in the anonymous letter as Gavitt, the deck-hand.

At the end of the week two facts were sufficiently apparent. The first was that there had been a real John Gavitt, a consumptive roustabout on the New Orleans river-front; a person easily traceable up to the time of his disappearance on or about the day of the robbery, and whose description, gathered from those who had known him well, tallied not at all with the best obtainable word-picture of the bank-robber. Fact the second was a corollary of the first: by some means the robber had contrived to change places with Gavitt; to take his place in the *Belle Julie's* crew and to assume his name.

Broffin called this step in the outworking of his problem an incident closed when he had wired the postmaster of the little Iowa river town from which the true Gavitt had migrated, and had received the expected reply. John Wesley Gavitt had reached home two days after the date of the bank robbery, had died within the week, and had been buried beside his wife.

The next step was purely constructive; an attempt to build, upon the description given by President

Galbraith and the teller Johnson, a likeness which would fit some notorious "strong-arm man" known to the criminal records and the rogues' galleries. Broffin was not greatly disappointed when the effort failed.

"It's just about as I've been putting it up, all along," he mused, lighting his pipe and filling with a fragrant cloud the cramped little office in which he did his research work. "The fellow ain't a crook; he's an amateur, and this is his first break. That being the lay-out, he's liable to do all the things, the different kinds of things, that a sure-enough 'strong-arm man' wouldn't do."

It was to Bainbridge, sitting at the desk's end and turning the leaves of a rogues'-gallery reprint, that the musing conclusion was directed. The reporter was freshly returned from his jaunt to the banana coast, and he had climbed Broffin's stair to get the story of the Mortsen capture.

"He did one of the different things when he worked his way out of here in a deck crew," suggested Bainbridge. "The real thug wouldn't have done anything so honestly toilsome as that."

"Hardly," Broffin acquiesced. "There was about one chance in a thousand, and on that chance I've been looking for a picture that would fit him. There ain't any."

The reporter was glancing over his notes of the Mortsen story, and he got up to go.

"Well, I'm glad it's your job and not mine," he said, by way of leave-taking. "If your guess is right,

it's like looking for the traditional needle in the haystack."

"Ump," said Broffin; and for a good hour after the reporter had gone he sat slowly swinging in the creaking office chair, smoking pipe after pipe and thinking.

At the end of the reflective revery he closed his desk, locked his office, and went once more to the bank. It was the hour of the noon lull, and Johnson, the paying teller, was free to talk.

"I hope I'll get through bothering you, some day, Mr. Johnson," Broffin began. "But when I get stuck, I have to come to you. What Mr. Galbraith don't remember would crowd a dictionary."

The teller made good-natured apologies for his chief. "Mr. Galbraith was a good bit upset, naturally. It was a pretty bad wrench for a man of his age."

"Sure, it was; and he's feeling it yet. That's why I'm letting him alone when I can. Just go once more carefully over the part of it that you saw, won't you?"

Johnson retold the story of the cashing of the president's check, circumstantially, and with the exactness of a man trained in a school of business accuracy.

"You'd make a good witness, Mr. Johnson," was Broffin's comment. "You can tell the same story twice, hand-running, which is more than most folks can do. Would you know the young woman if you'd see her again?"

"Hardly, I think."

"You say she was cashing a draft: how was she identified?"

"She had credentials from her home bank, with her signature attested."

"Of course, she didn't surrender her letter of identification?"

"No; we don't require it when the letter is a general one and not a credit letter."

Broffin pulled thoughtfully at his drooping mustaches. He was rearranging the pieces on the mental chess-board. He had not yet asked either of the questions he had come to ask. Without knowing the science even by name, he was still enough of a psychologist to prepare the way by leading the mind of the witness cleverly over the details of its own memory picture.

"You say the hold-up made way for the lady here at the window: you saw him do it?"

"Yes."

"Did any sign of recognition pass between them —anything to make you think that they might be acquainted with each other?"

This was one of the two critical questions, and the teller took time to consider.

"It's pretty hard to tag that with a definite 'yes' or 'no,'" he said, when the memory-searching moment had passed. "He spoke to her; of that I am quite sure, though I didn't hear what he said. She nodded and smiled. She had a beautiful face, and I remember how it lighted up when he spoke and stepped back."

"Then they might have been acquainted, you think?" Broffin said, adding quickly: "Don't let the fact that she afterward tried to set the dogs on him twist your judgment any. She might have known the man, and still be unwilling, afterward, to shield the criminal."

Again Johnson took time to be accurate.

"I'll admit that my impression at the time was that they were acquainted," he averred, at the end of the ends. "Of course you can't bank much on that. He might have said to a perfect stranger, 'After you,' or whatever it was that he did say; and she would acknowledge the courtesy with the nod and the smile—any well-bred woman would. But you can take it for what it is worth; my thought at the moment was that they had met before; casually, perhaps, as people meet on trains or in hotels; that there was at least recognition on both sides."

Broffin was nodding slowly. It was not often that he made a confidant of a witness, even in the smaller details of a case, but he evidently considered the helpful teller an exception.

"I've been working around to that notion myself, by the smalls, as the cat eat the grind-rock," he said. "I said to myself, Would he, with the big pull-off still trembling on the edge—would he have held back for a woman he didn't know? And if he *did* know her, it would be a good, chunky reason why he shouldn't crowd in and take his turn: he'd *have* to make good or lose whatever little ante he'd been putting up in the sociable game. Now one other

little thing: you counted him out the single thousand in small bills first, you said: then what happened?"

"Then I went to the vault."

"And when you came back, the young woman was gone?"

"Oh, yes; she went while Mr. Galbraith was handing me his check."

"She left before you started for the vault?"

"Yes."

"You didn't notice whether she said 'Good-by' or 'Thank you,' or anything like that, I reckon?"

"No."

"But she might have, and you not see it?"

"Yes; she might have."

"All right; then we'll go on," Broffin continued, and the time having arrived for the putting of the second critical question, he planted it fairly. "You opened the wicket and passed the money out to the hold-up. He took it and backed to the door—this nearest door. Mr. Galbraith tells me he gave the alarm as quick as he could draw his breath. How much time did the fellow have before somebody went after him?"

Johnson's answer was gratifyingly prompt.

"You might say, no time at all. There were a number of people in the bank—perhaps a dozen or more—standing around waiting their turns at the different wickets. I should say that every single one of them made a rush for the doors, and I remember thinking at the time that the fellow couldn't possibly get away."

"Yet he did get away; made his drop-out so neatly that none of the rushers got to the doors soon enough to catch a sight of him?"

"That is the curious fact. Not a man of them saw him. They all told the same story. The sidewalk wasn't crowded at the time: we are on the sunny side of the street, and as you see now, the crowd is on the other side in the shade. Yet the fellow had vanished before the nimblest one of them got to the doors."

Broffin drew a deep breath and nodded slowly. The added details were fitting the new theory to a nicety. In conversation with the president he had previously marked the fact that the robber had claimed to be starving.

"Thank you, Mr. Johnson; I reckon that's all for this time," he said to the teller, and a minute later he was buying a cigar of the little Gascon proprietor of the restaurant next door to the bank.

"You have an excellent memory, I've been told, Monsieur Pouillard," he said, at the lighting of the cigar. "Do you recollect the day of the bank robbery next door pretty well?"

The Gascon shrugged amiably. "*Vraiment*, M'sieu' Broffin; it ees not possib' that one forgets."

"It was rather late for breakfast, and not quite late enough for lunch: were you feeding many people just then?"

"H-onlee one; he is yo'ng man w'at don' nevveh come on my 'otel biffo'. He is sit on dat secon' table; *oui!*"

Broffin pushed the probe of inquiry a little deeper. How did M. Pouillard happen to remember? *Mais*, it was because the young man was very droll; he was of the cold blood. When Victor, *le garçon*, would have brought news of the *émeute*, he had said, breakfast first, and the news afterward.

Questioned in his turn, the serving-man corroborated his employer's particulars and was able to add a few of his own. The young man was fair, with blue eyes and a reddish beard and mustaches. The mustaches were untrimmed, but the beard was clipped to a point, *à les moeurs des étudiants des Beaux Arts*. The waiter had once served tables in a Paris café, and he seldom lost an opportunity of advertising the fact. Pressed to account for his accurate memory picture of a chance patron, he confessed naïvely; the tip had been princely and the young man was one to mark and to remember—and to serve again.

Broffin left the restaurant with one more link in the chain neatly forged. There was an excellent reason why none of the first-aid pursuers had been able to catch a glimpse of the "strong-arm man." He had merely stepped from the bank entrance to Monsieur Pouillard's. Between the café breakfast and the departure of the *Belle Julie* there lay an hour and a quarter. In that interval he could easily perfect his simple disguise. Broffin was not specially interested in the incidental minutiæ. It was the identity of the man with the untrimmed mustaches and the pointed beard that must be established.

After another week of patient groping, Broffin was obliged to confess that the problem of identification was too difficult to be solved on conventional lines. It presented no point of attack. With neither a name nor a pictured face for reference, inquiry was crippled at the very outset. None of the many boarding- and rooming-houses he visited had lost a lodger answering the verbal description of the missing man. Very reluctantly, for bull-dog tenacity was the detective's ruling characteristic, he was forced to the conclusion that the only untried solution lay in Teller Johnson's unfortified impression that the chance meeting at his wicket was not the first meeting between the robber and the young woman with the draft to be cashed.

It was the slenderest of threads, and Broffin realized sweatingly how difficult it might be to follow. Assuming that there had been a previous meeting or meetings, or rather the passing acquaintance which was all that the young woman's later betrayal of the man made conceivable, would the writer of the accusing letter be willing to add to her burden of responsibility by giving the true name and standing of the man whose real identity—if she knew it—she had been careful to conceal in the unsigned note to Mr. Galbraith? Broffin read the note again —"a deck-hand, whose name on the mate's book is John Wesley Gavitt," was the description she had given. It might, or it might not, be an equivocation; but the longer Broffin dwelt upon it the more he leaned toward the conclusion to which his

theory and the few known facts pointed. The young woman knew the man in his proper person; she had been reluctant to betray him—that, he decided, was sufficiently proved by the lapse of time intervening between the date of her note and its postmark date; having finally decided to give him up, she had told only what was absolutely necessary, leaving him free to conceal his real name and identity if he would—and could.

Having come thus far on the road to convincement, Broffin knew what he had to do and set about the doing of it methodically. A telegram to the clerk of the *Belle Julie* served to place the steamer in the lower river; and boarding a night train he planned to reach Vicksburg in time to intercept the witnesses whose evidence would determine roughly how many hundreds or thousands of miles he could safely cut out of the zigzag journeyings to which the following up of the hypothetical clew would lead.

For, cost what it might, he was determined to find the writer of the unsigned letter.

XVIII

THE ZWEIBUND

On his second visit to the sick man lodged in the padded luxuries of one of the guest-rooms at Mereside, made on the morning following the Grierson home-coming, Dr. Farnham found the hospital status established, with the good-natured Swede installed as nurse, the bells muffled, and Miss Margery playing the part of Sister Superior and dressing it, from the dainty, felt-soled slippers to the smooth banding of her hair.

An hour later, however, it was the Margery of the Wahaskan Renaissance, joyously clad and radiant, who was holding the reins over a big English trap horse, parading down Main Street and smiling greetings to everybody.

By one of the chances which he was willing to call fortunate, Edward Raymer was at the curb to help her down from her high seat in the trap when she pulled the big horse to a stand in front of her father's bank.

"I'm the luckiest man in Red Earth County; I was just wondering when I should get in line to tell you how glad we are to have you back," he said, with his eyes shining.

"Are you, really? You are not half as glad as I am to be back. There is no place like home, you know."

"There isn't, and there oughtn't to be," was his quick response. "I've been hoping you'd come to look upon Wahaska as your home, and now I know you do."

"Why shouldn't I?" she laughed, and she was reaching for a paper-wrapped package on the trap seat when he got it for her.

"You are going somewhere?—may I carry it for you?" he asked; but she shook her head and took it from him.

"Only into the bank," she explained; and she was beginning to tell him he must come to Mereside when the sick-man episode obtruded itself, and the invitation was broken in the midst, very prettily, very effectively.

"I know," Raymer said, in instant sympathy. "You have your hands full just now. Will you let me say that it's the finest thing I ever heard of—your taking that poor fellow home and caring for him?"

Gertrude Raymer had once said in her brother's hearing that Miss Grierson's color would be charming if it were only natural. Looking into Miss Grierson's eyes Raymer saw the refutation of the slander in the suffusing wave of generous embarrassment deepening in warm tints on the perfect neck and cheek.

"Oh, dear me!" she said in pathetic protest; "is it all over town so soon? I'm afraid we are still dreadfully 'country' in Wahaska, Mr. Raymer.

Please cut it down to the bare, commonplace facts whenever you have a chance, won't you? The poor man was sick, and nobody knew him, and somebody *had* to take care of him."

Like the doctor, Raymer asked the inevitable question, "Who is he, Miss Margery?" and, like the doctor again, he received the same answer, "I haven't the smallest notion of an idea. But that doesn't make the slightest difference," she went on. "He is a fellow human being, sick and helpless. That ought to be enough for any of us to know."

Raymer stood watching her as she tripped lightly into the bank, and when he went to catch his car the conservative minority had lost whatever countenance or support he had ever given it.

"She's pure gold when you dig down through the little top layer of harmless scheming for the social Grand-Viziership," he told himself, tingling with the exultant thrills of the discoverer of buried treasure. "If all Wahaska doesn't open its doors to her after this, it'll sure earn what's coming to it."

True to her latest characterization of herself, Margery had a nod and a pleasant smile for the young men behind the brass grilles as she passed on her way to the president's room in the rear. She found her father at his desk, thoughtfully munching the unburned half of one of the huge cigars, and named her errand.

"I want a safety-deposit box big enough to hold this," she said briefly, exhibiting the paper-wrapped packet.

Jasper Grierson, deeply immersed in a matter of business to which he had given the better part of the forenoon, replied without looking up: "Go and tell Murray; he'll fix you out," and it was not until after she had gone that it occurred to him to wonder what use she was going to make of a private box in the safety vault—a wonder that had lost itself in a multiplicity of other things before he saw her again.

. . . . . .

For a week after his unmarked arrival in Wahaska, the castaway in the upper room at Mereside made hard work of it, giving the good little doctor with the kindly eyes and the straight-line Puritan lips a rather anxious fight to gain the upper hand of the still unnamed malady.

During the week there were many callers at the lake-fronting mansion; some coming frankly to welcome the returned house-mistress, others to make the welcoming an excuse for finding out the particulars in the castaway episode. But neither faith nor good works seemed to have any effect on the rebellious minority, and at the end of the week Raymer once more had the pleasure of lifting Miss Grierson from the high trap at the door of the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank, and of exchanging a few words with her before she went in to see her father.

As on any other business day, President Grierson was solidly planted in his heavy arm-chair before a desk well littered with work. He nodded absently to his daughter as she entered, and knowing that the nod meant that he would come to the surface

of things—her surface—when he could, she turned aside to the window and waited.

Though she had seen him develop day by day in less than three of the thirty-odd years of his Western exile, her father offered a constant succession of surprises to her. When she opened the door to retrospection, which was not often, she remembered that the man who had stumbled upon the rich quartz vein in Yellow Dog Gulch could scarcely sign his name legibly to the papers recording his claim; that in those days there was no prophecy of the ambitious present in the man, half drunkard and half outlaw, whose name in the Yellow Dog district had been a synonym for—but these were unpleasant memories, and Margery rarely indulged them.

Just now she put them aside by turning her back upon the window and taking credit for the tasteful and luxurious appointments of the private office, with its soft-piled rug and heavy mahogany furnishings. Her father was careless of such things; totally indifferent to them in business hours; but she saw to it that his surroundings kept pace with the march of prosperity. Here in Wahaska, as elsewhere, a little judicious display counted for much, even if there were a few bigoted persons who affected to despise it.

She was in the midst of a meditated attack upon the steamship lithographs on the walls—sole remaining landmarks of the ante-Grierson period—when her father wheeled in his pivot-chair and questioned her with a lift of his shaggy eyebrows.

"Want to see me, Madgie?"

"Just a moment." She crossed the room and stood at the end of the big desk. He reached mechanically for his check-book, but she smiled and stopped him. "No; it isn't money, this time: it's something that money can't buy. I met Mr. Edward Raymer at the front door a few minutes ago; does he have an account with you?"

"Yes."

"Is it an accommodation to the bank, or to him?"

Jasper Grierson's laugh was grimly contemptuous.

"The bank isn't making anything out of him. The shoe is on the other foot."

"Do you mean that he is a borrower?"

"Not yet; but he wants to be. He was in to see me about it just now."

"What is the matter? Isn't he making money with his plant?"

"Oh, yes; his business is good enough. But he's like all the other young fools, nowadays; he ain't content to bet on a sure thing and grow with his capital. He wants to widen out and build and put in new machinery and cut a bigger dash generally. Thinks he's been too slow and sure."

"Are you going to stake him?" Margery waged relentless war with her birthright inclination to lapse into the speech of the mining-camps, but she stumbled now and then in talking to her father.

"I don't know; I guess not. Somehow, I've never had much use for him; and, besides, I've had another plan in mind."

"And that was?"

"To organize another company and build a plant big enough to run him out."

Margery was turning the leaves of an illustrated prospectus of an Idaho irrigation company, and was apparently much more deeply interested in the electrotyped pictures than in the fortunes of Mr. Edward Raymer. And when she went on, she ignored the obliterative business suggestion and remained in the narrower channel of the personalities.

"Why haven't you any use for him?"

"Oh, I don't know: because, until just lately, he has never seemed to have much use for me, I guess. It's a stand-off, so far as likings go. I offered to reincorporate his outfit for him six months ago, and told him I'd take fifty-one per cent of the reorganization stock myself; but he wouldn't talk about it. Said what little he had was his own, and he proposed to keep it."

"But now he is willing to let you help him?"

"Not much; he don't look at it in that light. He wants to borrow money from the bank and put up the stock of his close corporation as collateral. It's safe enough, but I don't believe I'll do it."

The chatelaine of Mereside laid the prospectus aside and came abruptly to the point.

"I want you to do it," she said, decisively.

"The devil you do!" Then, with the dry door-hinge chuckle: "It was a waste of good money to put in the ice plant while you're here, Madgie. What's in the wind, now?"

"Maybe I'll tell you—sometime."

The president chuckled again and tilted to the comfortable angle in the arm-chair.

"Tell me now; you don't need to beat any of the bushes with me, little girl. If you say the word, I'll pinch him for you."

"I didn't say that I wanted him pinched. But I do want you to put him under obligations to you—the heavier the better. His mother and sister have gone out of their way to snub me, and I want to play even."

Grierson wagged his huge head, and this time the chuckle grew to a guffaw.

"I thought maybe that was the game. But it won't work with him; not for a single minute."

"Why won't it?"

"Because he ain't the man to go to his women-folks when he gets into hot water. He'll keep it to himself; and they'll go on bluffing you, same as ever."

Miss Grierson pulled on her gauntlets and made ready to go, leisurely, as befitted her pose.

"That is where you are mistaken," she objected, coolly. "It isn't very often that I can give you a business tip, but this is one of the times when I can. When John Raymer died, he left an undivided half of his estate to his wife, the other half to be shared equally by the two children. At the present moment, every dollar the entire family has is invested in the iron plant. So, you see, I know what I am doing."

Jasper Grierson turned the leaf of a calendar-pad and made a brief memorandum.

"I *savez:* I'll break the three-cornered syndicate for you."

"You will do nothing of the kind," asserted the radiant daughter of men, with serene assurance. "You will let Mr. Raymer get himself into hot water, as you call it, and then, when I say the word, you'll reach in and pull him out."

"Oh, that's the how of it, is it? All right; anything you say goes as it lays. But I'm going to make one condition, this time: you'll have to keep cases on the game yourself, and say when. I can't be bothered keeping the run of your society tea-parties."

"I don't want you to. Don't be late for dinner: we are going to the Rodneys' for the evening."

When she was gone, the president selected another of the overgrown cigars from a box in the desk drawer, lighted it, and tilted back in the big arm-chair to envelop himself in a cloud of smoke. It was his single expensive habit—the never-empty box of Brobdingnagian cigars in the drawer—and the indulgence helped him to push the Yellow-Dog period into a remoter past.

After a time the smoke cloud became articulate, rumbling forth chucklings and Elizabethan oaths, mingling with musings idiomatic and profane. "By God, I believe she thought she was fooling me—I do, for a fact! But it's too thin. Of course, she wants to make the women kow-tow, but that ain't

all there is to it—not by a jugful. But it's all right: she plays her own hand, and she's bully good and able to play it. If she's after Raymer's scalp, he might as well get ready to wear a wig, right now. I'll back her to win, every time."

Accordingly, when Mr. Edward Raymer came out of the president's room at the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank the following morning, he was treading upon air. For in his mind's eye there was a fair picture of a great and successful industry to be built upon the substantial extension of credit promised by the capitalist whose presence chamber he had just quitted.

XIX

LOSS AND GAIN

STRIVING feebly as one who gathers up the shards and fragments after an explosion, Griswold remembered cloudily the supper of tasteless courses at the Hotel Chouteau, still less distinctly, a drive through the streets to a great, echoing railway station, a glare of lights too painful to be borne, and, last of all, an overpowering weariness shutting down upon him like a sudden closing in of darkness become thick and stifling.

Afterward there were vague impressions, momentary breaches in the wall of inclosing darkness when he had realized that he was curiously helpless, and that he was still on the train going somewhere, though he could not remember where. In one of these intervals a woman had stood beside him, and he seemed to remember that she had put her cool hand on his forehead.

Of the transition from the train to the bed in the upper room at Mereside, he recalled nothing, though the personalities of two strangers, the doctor and the nurse, obtruded themselves frequently in the later phases of the troubled dream, like figures in a shadow pantomime. Also, that suggestion of the

presence of the woman with the cool palm became self-repeating; and finally, when complete consciousness returned, the dream impression was still so sharply defined that he was not surprised to find her standing at his bedside.

He did not recognize her. The memory of his supper companions of the Hotel Chouteau café was deeply buried under the dream débris, and the present moment was full of mild bewilderment. Yet the friendliness in her eyes seemed to shine out of some past which ought to be remembered.

Before he could frame any of the queries which came thronging to the door of the returned consciousness, she smiled and shook her head and forbade him.

"No, you mustn't talk," she said, with gentle authority. "It's the doctor's orders. By and by, when you are stronger, you may ask all the questions you please; but not now."

He wagged his head on the pillow. "Can't I even ask where I am?" he begged.

"Since you have asked, I'll tell you that much. You are in Wahaska, Minnesota, in the house of your friends; and you have nothing to do but to get well as fast and as comfortably as you can."

Her voice was even more remindful than her face of that elusive past which ought to be remembered, and he closed his eyes to try to recall it. When he opened them again, she was gone and her place was taken by one of the figures of the dream; a man with a thick mop of fair hair and a face of blank

good-nature, and whose store of English seemed to be comprised in a single sentence: "*Ja, ja;* Hae bane poorty vell, t'ank yo'."

Later in the day the doctor came; and when the professional requirements were satisfied, Griswold learned the bare facts of his succoring. It was characteristic of the Griswold of other days that the immense obligation under which the Griersons had placed him made him gasp and perspire afresh.

"Who ever heard of such a thing, doctor?" he protested weakly. And then: "How am I ever going to repay them?"

Dr. Farnham was crisply explicit. "You may leave Mr. Grierson out of your problem. Miss Margery is an only child, and if she sees fit to turn Mereside into a temporary hospital, he is abundantly able to indulge her."

"Then I am indebted to the daughter, alone?"

"Entirely, I should say."

Griswold looked long and earnestly at the face of his professional adviser. It was a good face, clearly lined, benevolent, and, above all, trustworthy.

"Tell me one thing more, doctor, if you can. What was the motive? Was it just heavenly good-heartedness?—or——"

The doctor's smile was the least possible shade wintry.

"When you have lived a few years longer in this world of ours, you will not probe too deeply into motives; you will take the deed as the sufficient exponent of the prompting behind it. If I say so

much, you will understand that I am not impugning Miss Grierson's motives. There are times when she is the good angel of everybody in sight."

"And this is one of the times?" persisted the analyst.

"We shall say that this is one of the times: say it and stick to it, Mr.——"

The pause after the courtesy title was significant, and Griswold filled it promptly. "Griswold—Kenneth Griswold. Do you mean to say that you haven't known my name, doctor?"

"We have not. We took the Good Samaritan's privilege and ransacked your belongings—Miss Margery and I—thinking that there might be relatives or friends who should be notified."

"And you found nothing?" queried the sick man, a cold fear gripping at his heart.

"Absolutely nothing to tell us who you were; no cards, letters, or memoranda of any kind. The conclusion was obvious: some one had taken advantage of your illness on the train and had picked your pockets."

Griswold moistened his lips and swallowed hard. "There were two suit-cases: were they lost?"

"No; they are here."

"And you found nothing in them?"

"Nothing but clothing and your toilet tools, a pistol, and a typewritten book manuscript bearing no signature."

Griswold turned his face away and shut his eyes. Once more his stake in the game of life was gone.

"There was another package of—of papers in one of the grips," he said, faintly; "quite a large package wrapped in brown paper."

"Valuables?" queried the doctor, sympathetically curious.

"Y-yes; rather valuable."

"We found nothing but the manuscript. Could any one else make use of the papers you speak of?"

Griswold was too feeble to prevaricate successfully.

"There was money in the package," he said, leaving the physician to infer what he pleased.

"Ah; then you were robbed. It's a pity we didn't know it at the time. It is pretty late to begin looking for the thief now, I'm afraid."

"Quite too late," said Griswold monotonously.

The doctor rose to go.

"Don't let the material loss depress you, Mr. Griswold," he said, with encouraging kindliness. "The one loss that couldn't have been retrieved is a danger past for you now, I'm glad to say. Be cheerful and patient, and we'll soon have you a sound man again. You have a magnificent constitution and fine recuperative powers; otherwise we should have buried you within a week of your arrival."

It was not until after the doctor had gone that Griswold was able to face the new misfortune with anything like a sober measure of equanimity. Imaginative to the degree which facilely transforms the suppositional into the real, he was still singularly

free from superstition. Nevertheless, all the legends clustering about the proverbial slipperiness of ill-gotten gains paraded themselves insistently. It was only by the supremest effort of will that he could push them aside and address himself to the practical matter of getting well. That was the first thing to be considered; with or without money, he must relieve the Griersons of their self-assumed burden at the earliest possible moment.

This was the thought with which he sank into the first natural sleep of convalescence. But during the days which followed, Margery was able to modify it without dulling the keen edge of his obligation. What perfect hospitality could do was done, without ostentation, with the exact degree of spontaneity which made it appear as a service rendered to a kinsman. It was one of the gifts of the daughter of men to be able to ignore all the middle distances between an introduction and a friendship; and by the time Griswold was strong enough to let the big, gentle Swede plant him in a Morris chair in the sun-warmed bay-window, the friendship was a fact accomplished.

"Do you know, you're the most wonderful person I have ever known?" he said to Margery, on the first of the sunning days when she had come to perch in the window-seat opposite his chair.

"It's propinquity," she laughed. "You haven't seen any other woman for days and weeks. Wait until you are strong enough to come down to one of my 'evenings.'"

"No, it isn't propinquity," he denied.

"Then it's the unaccustomed. You are from the well-behaved East. There are some people even here in Wahaska who will tell you that I have never properly learned how to behave."

"Your looking-glass will tell you why they say that," he said gravely.

Her smile showed the perfect rows of white teeth. "You are recovering rapidly, Mr. Kenneth; don't you think so? Or was that only a little return of the fever?"

He brushed the bit of mockery aside. "I want to be serious to-day—if you'll let me. There are a lot of things I'd like to know."

"About Wahaska?"

"About you, first. Where did we meet?—before I came out of the fever woods and saw you standing by the bed?"

"We didn't 'meet,' in the accepted meaning of the word. My father and I happened to sit at your table one evening in the Hotel Chouteau, in St. Louis."

"Ah; I knew there was a day back of the other days. Do you believe in destiny?"

She nodded brightly. "Sometimes I do; when it brings things out the way I want them to come out."

"I've often wondered," he went on musingly. "Think of it: somewhere back in the past you took the first step in a path which was to lead you to that late supper in the Chouteau. Somewhere in

my past I took the first step in the crooked trail that was to lead me there."

"Well?" she encouraged.

"The paths crossed—and I am your poor debtor," he finished. "I can never hope to repay you and your father for what you have done."

"Oh, yes you can," she asserted lightly. "You can pass it along to the man farther down. Forget it, and tell me what you want to know about Wahaska."

"First, I'd like to know my doctor's name."

"The idea!" she exclaimed. "Hasn't there been anybody to introduce you? He is Wahaska's best-beloved 'Doctor Bertie'; otherwise Doctor Herbert C. Farnham."

"*Doctor Farnham?*—not Miss Char——" He bit the name in two in the middle, but the mischief was done.

"Yes; Charlotte's father," was the calm reply. Then: "Where did you meet Miss Farnham?"

"I haven't met her," he protested instantly; "she—she doesn't know me from Adam. But I have seen her, and I happened to learn her name and her home address."

Miss Margery's pretty face took on an expression of polite disinterest, but behind the mask the active brain was busily fitting the pegs of deduction into their proper holes. Her involuntary guest did not know the father; therefore he must have seen the daughter while she was away from home. Charlotte Farnham had been South, at Pass Christian,

and doubtless in New Orleans. The convalescent had also been in New Orleans, as his money packet with its Bayou State Security labels sufficiently testified.

Miss Grierson got up to draw one of the window shades. It had become imperative that she should have time to think and an excuse for hiding her face from the eyes which seemed to be trying masterfully to read her inmost thoughts.

"You think it is strange that I should know Miss Farnham's name and address without having met her?" Griswold asked, when the pause had become a keen agony.

Miss Grierson's rejoinder was flippant. "Oh, no; she is pretty enough to account for a stranger thing than that."

"She is more than pretty," said Griswold, impulsively; "she has the beauty of those who have high ideals, and live up to them."

"I thought you said you didn't know her," was the swift retort.

"I said I hadn't met her, and that she doesn't know me."

"Oh," said the small fitter of deduction pegs; and afterward she talked, and made the convalescent talk, pointedly of other things.

This occurred in the forenoon of a pleasant day in May. In the afternoon of the same day, Miss Grierson's trap was halted before the door of the temporary quarters of the Wahaska Public Library. Raymer saw the trap and crossed the street, remem-

bering—what he would otherwise have forgotten —that his sister had asked him to get a book on orchids.

Miss Margery was in the reference room, wading absently through the newspaper files. She nodded brightly when Raymer entered—and was not in the least dust-blinded by the library card in his hand.

"You are just in time to help me," she told him. "Do you remember the story of that daring bank robbery in New Orleans a few weeks ago?—the one in which a man made the president draw a check and get it cashed for him?"

Raymer did remember it, chiefly because he had talked about it at the time with Jasper Grierson, and had wondered curiously how the president of the Farmers' and Merchants' would deport himself under like conditions.

"Do you remember the date?" she asked.

Since it was tied to his first business interview with Grierson *père*, Raymer was able to recall the date, approximately, and together they turned the file of the *Pioneer Press* until they came to the number containing the Associated Press story of the crime. It was fairly circumstantial; the young woman at the teller's window figured in it, and there was a sketchy description of the robber.

"If you should meet the man face to face, would you recognize him from the description?" she flashed up at Raymer.

"Not in a thousand years," he confessed. "Would you?"

"No; not from the description," she admitted. Then she passed to a matter apparently quite irrelevant.

"Didn't I see Miss Farnham's return noticed in the *Wahaskan* the other day?"

With Charlotte's father a daily visitor at Mereside, it seemed incredible that Miss Grierson had not heard of the daughter's home-coming. But Raymer answered in good faith.

"You may have seen it some time ago. She and Miss Gilman have been home for three or four weeks."

"Somebody said they were coming up the river by boat; did they?"

"Yes, all the way from New Orleans."

"That must have been delightful, if they were fortunate enough to get a good boat. I've been told that the table is simply impossible on some of them."

"So it is. But they came up as far as St. Louis on one of the Anchor Lines—the *Belle Julie*—and even Miss Gilman admits that the accommodations were excellent."

She nodded absently and began to turn the leaves of the newspaper file. Raymer took it as his dismissal and went to the desk to get the orchid book. When he looked in again on his way to the street, Miss Grierson had gone, leaving the file of the *Pioneer Press* open on the reading desk. Almost involuntarily he glanced at the first-page headings, thrilling to a little shock of surprise when one of them proved to be the caption of another Associated

Press despatch giving a twenty-line story of the capture and second escape of the Bayou State Security robber on the levee at St. Louis.

The reading of the bit of stale news impressed him curiously. Why had Miss Margery interested herself in the details of the New Orleans bank robbery? Why—with no apparent special reason—should she have remembered it at all? or remembering it, have known where to look for the two newspaper references?

Raymer left the library speculating vaguely on the unaccountable tangents at which the feminine mind could now and then fly off from the well-defined circle of the conventionally usual. On rare occasions his mother or Gertrude did it, and he had long since learned the folly of trying to reduce the small problem to terms of known quantities masculine.

"Just the same, I'd like to know why, this time," he said to himself, as he crossed the street to the Manufacturers' Club. "Miss Grierson isn't at all the person to do things without an object."

XX

THE CONVALESCENT

After a few more days in the Morris chair; days during which he was idly contented when Margery was with him, and vaguely dissatisfied when she was not; Griswold was permitted to go below stairs, where he met, for the first time since the Grierson roof had given him shelter, the master of Mereside.

The little visit to Jasper Grierson's library was not prolonged beyond the invalid's strength; but notwithstanding its brevity there were inert currents of antagonism evolved which Margery, present and endeavoring to serve as a lightning-arrester, could neither ground nor turn aside.

For Griswold there was an immediate recrudescence of the unfavorable first impression gained at the Hotel Chouteau supper-table. He recalled his own descriptive formula struck out as a tag for the hard-faced, heavy-browed man at the end of the café table—"crudely strong, elementally shrewd, with a touch, or more than a touch, of the savage: the gray-wolf type"—and he found no present reason for changing the record.

Thus the convalescent debtor to the Grierson hospitality. And as for the Wahaskan money lord, it

is to be presumed that he saw nothing more than a hollow-eyed, impractical story-writer (he had been told of the manuscript found in Griswold's hand-baggage), who chanced to be Margery's latest and least accountable fad.

Griswold took away from the rather constrained ice-breaking in the banker's library a renewed resolve to cut his obligation to Jasper Grierson as short as possible. How he should begin again the mordant struggle for existence was still an unsolved problem. Of the one-thousand-dollar spending fund there remained something less than half: for a few weeks or months he could live and pay his way; but after that . . . Curiously enough, the alternative of another attack upon the plutocratic dragon did not suggest itself. That, he told himself, was an experiment tried and found wanting. But in any event, he must not outstay his welcome at Mereside; and with this thought in mind he crept down-stairs daily after the library episode, and would give Margery no peace because she would not let him go abroad in the town.

"Not to-day, but to-morrow," she said, finally, when there was no longer any good reason for denying him. "Wait until to-morrow, and if it's a fine day, I'll drive you in the trap."

"But why not to-day?" he complained.

" 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless'—what shall I say; patient, or guest, or—friend?" she laughed, garbling the quotation to fit the occasion.

"Shakespeare said 'child,'" he suggested mildly.

"And so shall I," she gibed—but the gibe itself was almost a caress. "Sometimes you remind me of an impatient boy who has been promised a peach and can't wait until it ripens. But if you must have a reason why I won't drive you this afternoon, you may. We are going to have a tiny little social function at Mereside this evening, and I want you to be fresh and rested for it."

"Oh, my dear Miss Margery!" protested the convalescent, reluctant to his finger-tips; "not to meet your friends! I am only your poor charity patient, and——"

"That will do," she declared, tyrannizing over him with a fine affectation of austere hostess-ship. "*I* say you are to come down-stairs this evening to meet a few of our friends. And you will come."

"Certainly, I shall come, if you wish it," he assented, remembering afresh his immense obligation; and when the time was ripe he made himself presentable and felt his way down the dimly lighted library stair, being minded to slip into the social pool by the route which promised the smallest splash and the fewest ripples.

It was a stirring of the Philistine in him that led him to prefigure weariness and banality in the prospect. Without in the least suspecting it, Griswold was a Brahmin of the severest sect on his social side; easily disposed to hold aloof and to criticise, and, as a man Eastern-bred, serenely assured that nothing truly acceptable in the social

sense could come out of the Nazareth of the West.

For this cause he was properly humiliated when he entered the spacious double drawing-rooms and found them so comfortably crowded by a throng of conventionally clothed and conventionally behaved guests that he was immediately able to lose himself—and any lingering trace of self-consciousness—in a company which, if appearances were to be trusted, was Western only by reason of Wahaska's location on the map. Indeed, the sudden and necessary rearrangement of the pieces on the prefigured chess-board was almost embarrassing; and Margery's greeting and welcome brought a grateful sense of relief and a certain recovery of self-possession for which, a few minutes earlier, he had thought there could be no possible Wahaskan demand.

"Thank you so much for coming down, and for resolving heroically not to be bored," she began brightly. "And now that you've made your little concession, I'll make mine. I sha'n't ask anything at all of you"—piling the cushions in the corner of a wide window-seat and making him sit down; "you are just to be an invalid this evening, you know, and you needn't meet any more people than you want to."

When she had patted the pillows into place and was gone to welcome still later comers, Griswold had a chance to look around him. The readjusting mechanism was still at work. Beyond question it was all very different, strikingly different, from his forecastings. A young woman was at the piano,

with a young man whose clothes fitted him and who was in nowise conscious of them, turning the music for her. There was a pleasant hum of conversation; the lights were not glaring; the furnishings were not in bad taste—on the contrary, they were in exceedingly good taste. Griswold smiled when he remembered that he had been looking forward to something suggesting a cross between a neighborhood tea-drinking and a church social. He was agreeably disappointed to find that the keynote was distinctly well-mannered, passably urban, undeniably conventional.

And the charming young hostess. . . . From his corner of the window-seat Griswold had a comprehensive view of the two great rooms, and beyond them through a pillared opening to the candle-lighted dining-room where the refreshments were served. Though the rooms were well filled, there was but a single personality pervading them for the eager student of types. Admitting that there were other women more beautiful, Griswold, groping always for the fitting figure and the apt phrase, told himself that Miss Grierson's crowning gift was an acute sense of the eternal harmonies; she was always "in character."

Hitherto he had known her only as his benefactress and the thoughtful caretaker for his comfort. But now, at this first sight of her in the broader social field, she shone upon and dazzled him. Admitting that the later charm might be subtly sensuous—he refused to analyze it too closely—it was undeniable

that it warmed him to a newer and a stronger life; that he could bask in its generous glow like some hibernating thing of the wild answering to the first thrilling of the spring-tide. True, Miss Grierson bore little resemblance to any ideal of his past imaginings. She might even be the *Aspasia* to Charlotte Farnham's *Saint Cecilia*. But even so, was not the daughter of Axiochus well beloved of men and of heroes?

It was some little time afterward, and Jasper Grierson, stalking like a grim and rather unwilling master of ceremonies among his guests, had gruffly introduced three or four of the men, when Griswold gladly made room in the window-seat for his transformed and glorified mistress of the fitnesses. As had happened more than once before, her nearness intoxicated him; and while he made sure now that the charm was at least partly physical, its appeal was none the less irresistible.

"Are you dreadfully tired?" she asked; adding quickly: "You mustn't let us make a martyr of you. It's your privilege to disappear whenever you feel like it."

"Indeed, I'm not at all tired," he protested. "It is all very comforting and homelike; so vastly—" he hesitated, seeking thoughtfully for the word which should convey his meaning without laying him open to the charge of patronizing superciliousness, and she supplied it promptly.

"So different from what you were expecting; I know. You have been thinking of us as barbarians

—outer barbarians, perhaps—and you find that we are only harmless provincials. But really, you know, we are improving. I wish you could have known Wahaska as it used to be."

"Before you took it in hand?" he suggested. "I can imagine it."

"Can you? I don't have to imagine it—I can remember: how we used to sit around the edges of the room behaving ourselves just as hard as ever we could, and boring one another to extinction. I'm afraid some of them do it yet, sometimes; but I won't let them do it here."

Once more Griswold let his gaze go at large through the stately rooms. He understood now. His prefigurings had not been so wide of the mark, after all. He had merely reckoned without his hostess.

"It is a miracle," he said, giving her full credit. "I'd like to ask how you wrought it, only I mustn't keep you from your duties."

She laughed joyously, with a little toss of the shapely head which was far more expressive than many words.

"I haven't any duties; I have taught them to amuse themselves. And they are doing it very creditably, don't you think?"

"They are getting along," he admitted. "But tell me: how did you go about it?"

"It was simple enough. When we came here we found a lot of good people who had fallen into the bad habit of boring one another, and a few who hadn't; but the few held themselves aloof. We

opened our house to the many, and tried to show them that a church sewing-circle isn't precisely the acme of social enjoyment. That is all."

Griswold saw in his mind's eye a sharply etched picture of the rise and progress of a village magnate cleanly struck out in the two terse sentences, and his respect for his companion in the wide window-seat increased in just proportion. Verily, Miss Margery had imagination.

"It is all very grateful and delightful to me," he confessed, at length. "I have been out of the social running for a long time, but I may as well admit that I am shamelessly Epicurean by nature, and an ascetic only when the necessities drive."

"I know," she assented, with quick appreciation. "An author has to be both, hasn't he?—keen to enjoy, and well hardened to endure."

He turned upon her squarely.

"Where did you ever learn how to say such things as that?" he demanded.

It was an opening for mockery and good-natured raillery, but she did not make use of it. Instead, she let him look as deeply as he pleased into the velvety eyes when she said: "It is given to some of us to see and to understand where others have to learn slowly, letter by letter. Surely, your own gift has told you that, Mr. Griswold?"

"It has," he acknowledged. "But I have found few who really do understand."

"Which is to say that you haven't yet found your other self, isn't it? Perhaps that will come, too,

if you'll only be patient—and not expect too many other gifts of the gods along with the one priceless gift of perfect sympathy."

"When I find the one priceless gift, I shall confidently expect to find everything else," he asserted, still held a willing prisoner by the bewitching eyes.

She laughed softly. "You'll be disappointed. The gift you demand will preclude some of the others; as the others would certainly preclude it. How can you be an author and not understand that?"

"I am not an author, I am sorry to say," he objected. "I have written but the one book, and I have never been able to find a publisher for it."

"But you are not going to give up?"

"No; I am going to rewrite the book and try again—and yet again, if needful. It is my message to mankind, and I mean to deliver it."

"Bravo!" she applauded, clapping her hands in a little burst of enthusiasm which, if it were not real, was at least an excellent simulation. "It is only the weak ones who say, 'I hope.' For the truly strong hearts there is only the one battle-cry, 'I will!' When you get blue and discouraged you must come to me and let me cheer you. Cheering people is *my* mission, if I have any."

Griswold's pale face flushed and the blood sang liltingly in his veins. He wondered if she had been tempted to read the manuscript of the book while he was fighting his way back to consciousness and life. If they had been alone together, he would

have asked her. The bare possibility set all the springs of the author's vanity upbubbling within him. There and then he promised himself that she should hear the rewriting of the book, chapter by chapter. But what he said was out of a deeper, and worthier, underthought.

"You have many missions, Miss Margery: some of them you choose, and some are chosen for you."

"No," she denied; "nobody has ever chosen for me."

"That may be true, without making me a false prophet. Sometimes when we think we are choosing for ourselves, chance chooses for us; oftener than not, I believe."

She turned on him quickly, and for a single swiftly passing instant the velvety eyes were deep wells of soberness with an indefinable underdepth of sorrow in them. Griswold had a sudden conviction that for the first time in his knowing of her he was looking into the soul of the real Margery Grierson.

"What you call 'chance' may possibly have a bigger and better name," she said, gravely. "Had you ever thought of that?"

"Give it any name you please, so long as you admit that it is something beyond our control," he conceded.

As had happened more than once before, she seemed to be able to read his inmost thought.

"You are thinking of the chain of incidents that brought you here? It is only the details that have

'happened.' You meant to come to Wahaska; you were carrying out a definite purpose of your own that night in St. Louis when you took your ticket. And coming here, sooner or later you would have found your way to this house—to a seat on these cushions. I could tell you more, but my prophetic soul warns me that Agatha Severance is protesting to Mr. Wamble that she can't *possibly* play the particular song he is asking for without the music. I'm going to convince her that she can."

Some little time after this, Raymer, who had been one of the men introduced by Jasper Grierson, turned up again in the invalid's corner.

"Sit down, won't you?" said Griswold, making a move to share the cushions with the young iron-master; and it was thus that the door to a friendship was opened. Farther on, when they had gotten safely beyond the commonplaces, Raymer suggested the smoking-room and a cigar, and Griswold went willingly.

"I was wondering if you were like me in that, Mr. Raymer," he said. "I never feel properly acquainted with a man until I have smoked with him."

"Or with a woman until she has made a cup of tea for you?" laughed the native. "That is Miss Margery's try-out. She has taught us the potentialities that lie in a cup of tea well brewed and skilfully sweetened."

From that on, the path to better acquaintance was the easiest of short-cuts, even as the mild cigar which Raymer found in his pocket-case paved the

way for a return of the smoker's zest in the convalescent. Without calling himself a reformer, the young ironmaster proved to be a practical sociologist. Wherefore, when Griswold presently mounted his own sociological hobby, he was promptly invited to visit the Raymer Foundry and Machine Works, to the end that he might have some of his theories of the universal oppression of wage-earners charitably modified.

"Of course, I don't deny that we're a long way from the Millennium, yet," was Raymer's summing up of the conditions in his own plant. "But I do claim that we are on a present-day, living footing. So far as the men understand loyalty, they are loyal; partly to my father's memory; partly, I hope, to me. We have never had a strike or an approach to one, or a disagreement that could not be adjusted amicably. Whether these conditions can be maintained after we double our capacity and get in a lot of new blood, I can't say. But I hope they can."

"You are enlarging?" said Griswold.

Raymer waited until the only other man in the smoking-den had gone back to the drawing-rooms before he said: "Yes; I caught the fever along with the rest of them a few weeks ago, and I'm already beginning to wish that I hadn't."

"You are afraid of the market?"

"N-no; times are good, and the market—our market, at least—is daily growing stronger. It is rather a matter of finances. I am an engineer, as

my father was before me. When it comes to wrestling with the money devil, I'm outclassed from the start."

"There are a good many more of us in the same boat," said Griswold, leaving an opening for further confidences if Raymer chose to make them. But the young ironmaster was looking at his watch, and the confidences were postponed.

"I'm keeping you up, when I daresay you ought to be in bed," he protested; but Griswold held him long enough to ask for a suggestion in a small matter of his own.

Now that he was able to be about, he was most anxious to relieve Miss Grierson and her father of the charge and care of one whose obligation to them was already more than mountain-high: did Raymer happen to know of some quiet household where the obligated one could find lodging and a simple table?

Raymer, taking time to think of it, did know. Mrs. Holcomb, the widow of his father's bookkeeper, owned her own house in Shawnee Street. It was not a boarding-house. The widow rented rooms to two of Mr. Grierson's bank clerks, and she was looking for another desirable lodger. Quite possibly she would be willing to board the extra lodger. Raymer, himself, would go and see her about it.

"It is an exceedingly kind-hearted community this home town of yours, Mr. Raymer," was the convalescent's leave-taking, when he shook hands

with the ironmaster at the foot of the stairs; and that was the thought which he took to bed with him after Raymer had gone to make his adieux to the small person who, in Griswold's reckoning, owned the kindest of the kind hearts.

XXI

BROFFIN'S EQUATION

HAVING Clerk Maurice's telegram to time the overtaking approach, Broffin found the *Belle Julie* backing and filling for her berth at the Vicksburg landing when, after a hasty Vicksburg breakfast, he had himself driven to the river front.

Going aboard as soon as the swing stage was lowered, he found Maurice, with whom he had something more than a speaking acquaintance, just turning out of his bunk in the texas.

"I took it for granted you'd be along," was Maurice's greeting. "What bank robber are we running away with now?"

Broffin grinned.

"I'm still after the one you took on in the place of John Gavitt."

"Humph!" said the clerk, sleepily; "I thought that one *was* John Gavitt."

"No; he merely took Gavitt's place and name. Tell me all you know about him."

"I don't know anything about him, except that he was fool enough to pull Buck M'Grath out of the river just after M'Grath had tried to bump him over the bows."

This was a new little side-light on the characteristics of the man who was wanted. Broffin pulled gently at the thread of narrative until he had all the particulars of the humane mutiny and the near-tragedy in which it had terminated.

"Stuck to him and kept him from drowning till you could pick 'em up, did he—what?" was his commentary on the story. "Then what happened?"

"Oh, nothing much—or nothing very different. Of course, Mac favored the fellow all he could, after that; gave him the light end of it when there was any light end. But he didn't get his chance to even up right until we got to St. Louis."

Here, apparently, was another overlooked item in the list of things to be considered, and Broffin grappled for it.

"How was that?" he asked.

"I don't know for a certainty. But I put it up that the fellow took Mac into his confidence—a little—and told him he wanted to make a run for it as soon as we hit the levee at St. Louis. He hadn't got his pay; we always hold the 'rousties'' money back till we're unloaded, if we can; so Mac advanced it, or claimed that he did."

It was Broffin's business to put two and two together, and at this conjuncture the process was sufficiently simple. With a hundred thousand dollars in his possession, the make-believe deck-hand would not be foolish enough to run even a hypothetical risk for the sake of saving the bit of wage-money. Broffin's next query seemed wholly irrelevant.

"Do you carry any nippers or handcuffs on the *Belle Julie*, Maurice?" he asked.

"Yes; I believe Mac has an odd pair or so in his dunnage; in fact, I know he has. I've seen him use 'em on an obstreperous nigger."

From the handcuffs Broffin went off at another tangent.

"Of course, so far as you know, nobody on the boat suspected that the fellow who called himself Gavitt was anything but the 'roustie' he was passing himself off for? You didn't know of his having any talk with any of the upper-deck people?"

"Only once," said the day-clerk, promptly.

"When was that?"

"It was one day just after the 'man-overboard' incident, a little while after dusk in the evening. I was up here in the texas, getting ready to go to supper. Gavitt—we may as well keep on calling him that till you've found another name for him—Gavitt had been cubbing for the pilot. I saw him go across the hurricane-deck and down the companion to the saloon-deck guards; and a minute later I heard him talking to somebody—a woman—on the guards below."

"You didn't hear what was said?"

"I didn't pay any attention. Passengers, women passengers especially, often do that—pull up a 'roustie' and pry into him to see what sort of wheels he has. But I noticed that they talked for quite a little while; because, when I finished dressing and went below, he was just leaving her."

Broffin rose up from the bunk on which he had been sitting and laid a heavy hand on Maurice's shoulder. "You ain't going to tell me that you didn't find out who the woman was, Clarence—what?" he said anxiously.

"That's just what I've got to tell you, Matt," returned the clerk reluctantly. "I was due at the second table, and I didn't go as far forward as the stanchion she was holding on to. All I can tell you is that she was one of the half-dozen or so younger women we had on board; I could guess at that much."

Broffin's oath was not of anger; it was a mere upbubbling of disappointment.

"Maurice, I've got to find that young woman if I have to chase her half-way round the globe, and it's tough luck to figure out that if you hadn't been in such a blazing hell of a hurry to get your supper that night, I might be able to catch up with her in the next forty-eight hours or so. But what's done is done, and can't be helped. Chase out and get your passenger list for that trip. We'll take the women as they come, and when you've helped me cull out the names of the ones you're sure it wasn't, I'll screw my nut and quit buzzing at you."

The clerk went below and returned almost immediately with the list. Together they went over it carefully, and by dint of much memory-wringing Maurice was able to give the detective leave to cancel ten of the seventeen names in the women's list, the remaining seven including all the might-

have-beens who could possibly be fitted into the clerk's recollection of the woman he had seen clinging to the saloon-deck stanchion after her interview with the deck-hand.

To these seven names were appended the addresses given in the steamer's registry record, though as to these Maurice admitted that the patrons of the boats were not always careful to comply with the regulation which required the giving of the home address.

"About as often as not they write down the name of the last place they stopped at," he asserted; and Broffin swore again.

"Which means that I may have to pound my ear eight or ten thousand miles on the varnished cars for nothing," he growled. "Well, there ain't any rest for the wicked, I reckon. Now tell me where I can find this man Buck M'Grath, and I'll fade away."

M'Grath was on duty, superintending the loading and unloading of the Vicksburg freight quotas; but when Broffin tapped him on the shoulder and showed his badge, the second mate was called in and M'Grath stood aside with his unwelcome interrupter.

There were difficulties from the outset. A man-driver himself, the chief mate shared with the sheerest outcast in his crew a hearty hatred for the man-catchers all and singular; and in the present instance his sympathies were with the fugitive from justice, on general principles first, and for good and

sufficient personal reasons afterward. Then, too, Broffin was hardly at his best. At the thought of what this man M'Grath could tell him, and was gruffly refusing to tell him, he lost his temper.

"You're edgin' up pretty close to the law, yourself, by what you're keeping back," he told the mate finally. "Sooner or later, I'm going to run this gentleman-roustie of yours down, anyhow, and it'll be healthier for you to help than to hinder. Do you know what he's wanted for?"

M'Grath did not know, and his enlargement upon the simple negative was explosively profane.

"Then I'll tell you. He was the 'strong-arm' man that held up the president of the Bayou State Security and made his get-away with a hundred thousand. Now will you come across?"

"No!" rasped the Irishman—and again there were embellishments.

"All right. When I catch up with him, you'll fall in for your share in the proceeds as an accessory after the fact. My men nabbed him on the levee at St. Louis, and when he euchred them he carried away a pair of handcuffs that somebody had to help him get shut of. He came back to the boat, and you are the man who took the handcuffs off!"

"'Tis a scrimshankin' lie, and ye can't prove ut!" said M'Grath.

"Maybe not; but there's one thing I can prove. This side-partner of yours didn't get his pay before he went ashore with the spring-line; *but you drew it for him afterwards!*"

M'Grath was cruelly cornered, but he still had the courage of his gratitude.

"Well, then, I did be taking the bracelets off av 'm. Now make the most av ut, and be damned to you! Did I know what he'd been doing? I did not. Do I know where he wint? I do not. Have I seen the naygur that skipped with him, from that day to this? I have not; nor would I be knowing 'm if I did see 'm. Anything else yez'd like to know? If there is, ye'll be taking ut on the tip av my fisht!" And he went back to his work, oozing profanity at every pore.

Thrown back upon the one remaining expedient, Broffin went ashore and became a student of railroad time-tables. Passing the incidents of the stubborn chase in review after many days, he wondered that it had not occurred to him to question Captain Mayfield. But that the captain would know anything at all about any particular bit of human driftwood in the ever-changing deck crew seemed easily incredible; and there was no good angel of clairvoyance to tell him that the captain had once been made the half-confidant of a distressed young woman who was anxious to be both just and merciful.

It was while he was waiting for the departure of the first northbound train that he planned the search for the young woman, arranging the names of the seven might-have-beens in the order of accessibility as indicated by the addresses given in the *Belle Julie's* register. In this arrangement Miss

Charlotte Farnham's name stood as Number Three; the two names outranking hers being assigned respectively to Terre Haute, Indiana, and Baldwin, Kansas.

In his after-rememberings, Broffin swore softly under the drooping mustaches when he recalled how, in that morning waiting at Vicksburg, he had hesitated and changed his mind many times before deciding upon the first three zigzags of the search. Terre Haute, Baldwin, and Wahaska lay roughly at the three extremities of a great triangle whose sides, measured in hours of railroad travel, were nearly equal. Failing at Terre Haute, the nearest point, he could reach either of the two remaining vertices of the triangle with fairly equal facility; and it was surely an ironical fate that led him to decide finally upon the Kansas town as the second choice.

Some twenty-odd hours after leaving Vicksburg, Broffin the tireless found himself in Terre Haute. Here failure had at least the comfort of finality. The Miss Heffelfinger of his list, whom he found and interviewed within an hour of his arrival, was a teacher of German whose difficulties with the English language immediately eliminated her from the diminishing equation. Broffin got away from the voluble little Berliner as expeditiously as possible and hastened back to the railway station. Kansas came next in his itinerary, and a westbound train was due to leave in a few minutes.

It was here again that fate mocked him. Arriving at the station, he found that the westbound

train was an hour late; also, that within the hour there would be a fast train to the north, with good connections for Wahaska. Once more he stumbled and fell into the valley of indecision. A dozen times during the forty-five minutes of grace he was on the point of changing his route; nay, more; at the last minute, when the caller had announced the northern train, he took a gambler's chance and spun a coin—heads for the north and tails for the west. The twirling half-dollar slipped from his fingers and rolled under one of the stationary seats in the waiting-room. Broffin got down on his hands and knees to grope for it, and while he was groping the chance to take the northbound "Limited" was lost. Moreover, when he finally found the coin it was standing upright in a crack in the floor.

Having now no alternative to distract him, he held to his original plan and was soon speeding westward toward the Kansan experiment-station. For two full days of twenty-four hours each he fought as only a determined man and a good traveller could fight to cover a distance which should have been traversed in something less than half of the time. Washouts, blocked tracks, missed connections, all these got in the way; and it was not until late in the afternoon of the third day out from Terre Haute that he was set down at the small station which serves the needs of the Kansas university town.

Having had himself conveyed quickly to the university, which was given as the address of the Miss

Sanborn whose name stood second in his list, he learned how shrewd a blow his implacable ill-luck had dealt him in making him the victim of so many delays. Miss Sanborn, it appeared, had been fitting herself at the denominational school to go out as a missionary. And some twelve hours before his arrival she had started on her long journey to the antipodes, going by way of San Francisco and the Pacific Mail.

Another man might have taken the more easily reached addresses in the list, leaving the appalling world-tour for the last. But the doggedness which had hitherto been Broffin's best bid for genius in his profession asserted itself as a ruling passion. Twenty minutes after having been given his body-blow by the dean of the theological school he had examined some specimens of Miss Sanborn's handwriting, had compared them with the unsigned letter, and was back at the little railroad station burning the wires to Kansas City in an attempt to find out the exact sailing date of the missionary's steamer from San Francisco.

When the answer came he found that his margin of time was something of the narrowest, but it was still a margin. By taking the first overland train which could be reached and boarded, he might, barring more of the ill-luck, arrive at San Francisco in time to overtake the young woman whose handwriting was so like, and yet in some respects quite strikingly unlike, that of the writer of the letter to Mr. Galbraith.

Under such conditions the long journey to the Pacific Coast was begun, continued, and, in due course of time, ended. As if it had exhausted itself in the middle passage, ill-luck held aloof, and Broffin's overland train was promptly on time when it rolled into its terminal at Oakland. An hour later he had crossed the bay and was in communication with the steamship people. Though it was within a few hours of the China steamer's sailing date, Miss Sanborn had not yet made her appearance, and once more, though the subject this time was wholly innocent, Broffin swore fluently.

Notwithstanding, after all these intermediate buffetings, it was only the ultimate disappointment which was reserved for the man who had come two thousand miles out of his way for a five-minute talk with a young woman. Almost at the last moment he found her, and in the same moment was made to realize that the similarity in handwriting was only a similarity. Miss Sanborn had been a passenger on the *Belle Julie*, boarding the steamboat at New Orleans and debarking at St. Louis. But she had known nothing of the Bayou State Security robbery until she had read of it in the newspapers; and one glance into the steadfast blue eyes that met his without flinching convinced Broffin that once more he had fired and missed.

Number Two in the list of seven being thus laboriously eliminated, Broffin, to be utterly consistent, should have boarded the first train for Minnesota. But inasmuch as three of the remaining

five addresses were west of the Missouri River, he sacrificed consistency to common-sense, halting at a little town in the Colorado mountains, again at Pueblo, and a third time at Hastings, Nebraska only to find at each stopping-place that the ultimate disappointment had preceded and was waiting for him.

With his list cancelled down to two names, he resumed the eastward flight from the Nebraska town and was again beset by the devil of indecision. The two place-names remaining were Wahaska and a small coal-mining town in southern Iowa. Measuring again by railroad hours, he found that the Iowa town was the nearer; but, on the other hand, there were good connections from Omaha to Wahaska, and a rather poor one to the coal mines. Once more Broffin took the gambler's chance, spinning the coin in his hat, heads for Iowa and tails for Minnesota. It came heads; and the following day recorded the sixth in the string of failures.

Leaving What Cheer in the caboose of a coal train, with only the train's crew for company, and a hard bench for a bed, the man-hunter was already thrilling to the exultant view-halloo in the chase. By the light of the flickering caboose lamp he drew his pencil through the Iowa failure. The one uncancelled name was now something more than a chance; it was a certainty.

"I've got you for fair, girlie, this time!" he triumphed, and since he did it audibly, the coal-train conductor laughed and wanted to be told the color of her eyes and hair.

"Got 'em pretty bad, ain't you, pardner?" he commented, when Broffin, loose-tongued in his elation, confessed that he was chasing a woman whom he had never seen. "I know how it goes: seen a picture of one once on a bill-board, and I'd 'a' gone plum to Californy after her if I hadn't been too danged busy to take a lay-off."

Landing in Wahaska the next evening, Broffin's first request at the hotel counter was for the directory. Running an eager finger down the "F's" he came to the name. It was the only Farnham in the list, and after it he read: "Dr. Herbert C., office 8 to 10, 2 to 4, 201 Main St., res. 16 Lake Boulevard."

Broffin had a traveller's appetite, and the café doors were invitingly open. Yet he denied himself until the clerk, busy at the moment with other guests, should be at liberty.

"I see there's a Doctor Farnham here," he said, when his time came. "I was wondering if he was the man I met up with down in New Orleans last winter."

The clerk shook his head.

"I guess not. Doctor Bertie hasn't taken a vacation since the oldest inhabitant can remember."

"H'm; that's funny," mused the detective, as one nonplussed. "The name's just as familiar as an old song. Is your Doctor Farnham a sort of oldish man?"

"He's elderly, yes; old enough to have a grown daughter." Then the clerk laughed. "Perhaps

you've got things tangled. Perhaps you 'met up' with Miss Charlotte. She was down on the Gulf Coast last winter."

"Not me," said Broffin, matching the ice-breaking laugh. And then he registered for a room and passed on into the café, deferring to the appetite which, for the first time in nearly four tedious weeks, he felt justified in indulging to the untroubled limit.

Having, by the slow but sure process of elimination, finally reduced his equation to its lowest terms, Broffin put the past four weeks and their failures behind him, and prepared to draw the net which he hoped would entangle the lost identity of the bank robber. After a good night's sleep in a real bed, he awoke refreshed and alert, breakfasted with an open mind, and presently went about the net-drawing methodically and with every contingency carefully provided for.

The first step was to assure himself beyond question that Miss Farnham was the writer of the unsigned letter. This step he was able, by a piece of great good fortune, to take almost immediately. A bit of morning gossip with the obliging clerk of the Winnebago House developed the fact that Dr. Farnham's daughter had once taught in the free kindergarten which was one of the charitable outreachings of the Wahaska Public Library. Two blocks east and one south: Broffin walked them promptly, made himself known to the librarian as a visitor interested in kindergarten work, and was

cheerfully shown the records. When he turned to the pages signed "Charlotte Farnham" the last doubt vanished and assurance was made sure. The anonymous letter writer was found.

It was just here that Matthew Broffin fell under the limitations of his trade. Though the detective in real life is as little as may be like the Inspector Buckets and the Javerts of fiction, certain characteristics persist. Broffin thought he knew the worth of boldness; where it was a mere matter of snapping the handcuffs upon some desperate criminal, the boldness was not wanting. But now, when he found himself face to face with the straightforward expedient, the craft limitations bound him. Instantly he thought of a dozen good reasons why he should make haste slowly; and he recognized in none of them the craftsman's slant toward indirection—the tradition of the trade which discounts the straightforward attack and puts a premium upon the methods of the deer-stalker.

Sooner or later, of course, the attack must be made. But only an apprentice, he told himself, would be foolish enough to make it without mapping out all the hazards of the ground over which it must be made. In a word, he must "place" Miss Farnham precisely; make a careful study of the young woman and her environment, to the end that every thread of advantage should be in his hands when he should finally force her to a confession. For by now the assumption that she knew the mysterious bank robber was no longer hypothetical in

Broffin's mind: it had grown to the dimensions of a conviction.

Wahaska was not difficult of approach on its gossiping side. Though it owned a charter and called itself a city, it was still in the country-town stage which favors a wide distribution of news with the personal note emphasized. Broffin, conveying the impression that he was a Louisiana lumberman on a vacation, approved himself as a good listener, and little more was needed. In a week he had traced the social outlines of the town as one finds the accent of a painting; in a fortnight he had grouped the Griersons, the Raymers, the Oswalds, the Barrs, and the Farnhams in their various interrelations, business and otherwise.

With the patient curiosity of his tribe he suffered no detail, however trivial, to escape its jotting down. To familiarize himself with the goings and comings of one young woman, he made the acquaintance of an entire town. He knew Jasper Grierson's ambition, and its fruitage in the practical ownership of Wahaska. He knew that Edward Raymer had borrowed money from Grierson's bank—and was likely to be unable to pay it when his notes fell due. He had heard it whispered that there had once been a love affair between young Raymer and Miss Farnham, and that it had been broken off by Raymer's infatuation for Margery Grierson. Also, last and least important of all the gossiping details, as it seemed at the time, he learned that the bewitching Miss Grierson was a creature of fads; that within

the past month or two she had returned from a Florida trip, bringing with her a sick man, a total stranger, who had been picked up on the train, taken to the great house on the lake shore and nursed back to life as Miss Grierson's latest defiance of the conventions.

It should have been a memorable day for Matthew Broffin when he had this sick man pointed out to him as Miss Grierson's companion in the high trap —which was also one of Miss Margery's bids for criticism in a town where the family carryall was still a feature. But Broffin was sufficiently human to see only a very beautiful young woman sitting correctly erect on the slanting driving-seat and holding the reins over a high-stepping horse which, he was told, had cost Jasper Grierson every cent of a thousand dollars. To be sure, he saw the man, as one sees a vanishing figure in a kaleidoscope. But there was nothing in the clean-shaven face of the gaunt, and as yet rather haggard, convalescent to evoke the faintest thrill of interest—or of memory.

XXII

IN THE BURGLAR-PROOF

A WEEK and a day after the opening of new vistas at Miss Grierson's "evening," Griswold—Raymer's intercession with the Widow Holcomb having paved the way—took a favorable opportunity of announcing his intention of leaving Mereside. It figured as a grateful disappointment to him—one of the many she was constantly giving him—that Margery placed no obstacles in the way of the intention. On the contrary, she approved the plan.

"I know how you feel," she said, nodding complete comprehension. "You want to have a place that you can call your own; a place where you can go and come as you please and settle down to work. You *are* going to work, aren't you?—on the book, I mean?"

Griswold replaced in its proper niche the volume he had been reading. It was Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and he had been wondering by what ironical chance it had found a place in the banker's library.

"Yes; that is what I mean to do," he returned. "But it will have to be done in such scraps and parings of time as I can save from some bread-and-butter occupation. One must eat to live, you know."

She was sitting on the arm of one of the big library lounging-chairs and looking up at him with a smile that was suspiciously innocent and childlike.

"You mean that you will have to work for your living?" she asked.

"Exactly."

"What were you thinking of doing?"

"I don't know," he confessed. "I have been hoping that Raymer might help me to find a place; possibly in the machine works as an under book-keeper, or something of that sort. Not that I know very much about any really useful occupation, when it comes to that; but I suppose I can learn."

Again he surprised the lurking smile in the velvety eyes, but this time it was half-mischievous.

"We have a college here in Wahaska, and you might get a place on the faculty," she suggested; adding: "As an instructor in philosophy, for example."

"Philosophy? that is the one thing in the world that I know least about."

"In theory, perhaps," she conceded, laughing openly at him now. "But in practice you are perfect, Mr. Griswold. Hasn't anybody ever told you that before?"

"No; and you don't mean it. You are merely taking a base advantage of a sick man and making fun of me. I don't mind: I'm in a heavenly temper this afternoon."

"Oh, but I do mean it, honestly," she averred. "You are a philosopher, really and truly, and I can

prove it. Do you feel equal to another little drive down-town?"

"Being a philosopher, I ought to be equal to anything," he postulated; and he went up-stairs to get a street coat and his hat.

She had disappeared when he came down again, and he went out to sit on the sun-warmed veranda while he waited. He had already forgotten what she had said about the object of the drive—the proving of the philosophic charge against him—and was looking forward with keenly pleasurable anticipations to another outing with her, the second for that day. It had come to this, now; to admitting frankly the charm which he was still calling sensuous, and which, in the moments of insight recurring, as often as they can be borne, to the imaginative, and vouchsafed now and then even to the wayfaring, he was still disposed to characterize as an appeal to that which was least worthy in him.

Latterly, however, he had begun to question himself more acutely as to the exact justice of this attitude; and while he was sunning himself on the veranda and listening for the hoof-beats of the big trap horse on the stable approach, he was doing it again. In those graver analytical moments he had called Margery a preternaturally clever little barbarian, setting his own immense obligation to her aside in deference to what he assumed to be the immutable realities. In the sun-warming excursion came another of those precious moments of insight; a moment in which he was given a sobering glimpse

of the deathless Philistine within. Who was he to be setting his machine-made ideals above the living, breathing, human fact whose very limitations and shortcomings might figure as angelic virtues when weighed in any balance save that of the Philistinic ego?

To admit the query was to admit a doubtful distrust of all the charted anchorages; those sure holding-grounds which he had once believed to be the very bottoming of facts assured and incontestible. From his lounging seat the trees on the lawn framed a noble vista of lakescape and crescent-curved beach drive, the latter with its water-facing row of modest mansions, the homes of Wahaska's well-to-do elect. At the end of the crescent he could see the chimneys of the Raymer house rising above a groving of young maples; and nearer at hand the substantial, two-storied frame house which Miss Grierson had pointed out to him as the home of the kindly Doctor Bertie. When he found himself drifting, his thoughts reverted automatically to Charlotte Farnham. There, if anywhere, lay the touchstone of truth and the verities; there, he told himself, was at least one life into which the doubtful distrust of the anchorages had never come.

Passing easily from Miss Farnham the ideal to Miss Farnham the flesh-and-blood reality, he was moved to wonder mildly why the fate which had brought him twice into critically intimate relations with her was now denying him even a chance meeting. For a week or more he had been going out

daily; sometimes with Miss Grierson in the trap, but oftener afoot and alone. The walking excursions had led him most frequently up and down the lakeside drive, but the doctor's house stood well back in its enclosure, and there was much shrubbery. Once he had heard her voice: she was reading aloud to some one on the vine-screened porch. And once again in passing, he had caught a glimpse of a shapely arm with the loose sleeve falling away from it as it was thrust upward through the porch greenery to pluck a bud from the crimson rambler adding its graceful mass to the clambering vines. It was rather disappointing, but he was not impatient. In the fulness of time the destiny which had twice intervened would intervene again. He was as certain of it as he was of the day-to-day renewal of his strength and vitality; and he could afford to wait. For, whatever else might happen in a mutable world, neither an ideal nor its embodiment may suffer change.

As if to add the touch of definitiveness to the presumptive conclusion, a voice broke in upon his revery; the voice of the young woman whose most alluring charm was her many-sided changefulness.

"What? no trap yet? Thorsen is outliving his usefulness; he is getting slower and pokier every added day he lives!" the voice was saying, with a faintly acid quality in it that Griswold had seldom heard. Then, as if she had marked his preoccupied gaze and divined its object: "You must have a little more patience, Mr. Griswold. All things come

to him who waits. When you have left Mereside finally, Doctor Bertie will some time take you home to dinner with him."

For his own peace of mind, Griswold hastily assured himself that it was only the wildest of chance shots. Since the day when he had admitted that he knew Miss Farnham's name without knowing Miss Farnham in person, the doctor's daughter had never been mentioned between them.

"How did you happen to guess that I was thinking of the good doctor?" he asked, curiously.

"You were not thinking of Doctor Bertie; you were thinking of Doctor Bertie's 'only'," was the laughing contradiction; and Griswold was glad that the coming of the man with the trap saved him from the necessity of falling any farther into what might easily prove to be a dangerous pitfall. Later on, while he was mechanically lifting his hat in recognition of the many salutations acknowledged by his companion in their triumphal progress down Main Street, he was still thankful and still puzzling over the almost uncanny coincidence. It was not the first time that Miss Grierson had seemed able to read his inmost thoughts.

The short afternoon drive paused at the curb in front of Jasper Grierson's bank, and, as on former occasions, Margery lightly scorned the convalescent's up-stretched arms and sprang unhelped to the pavement. But now her mood was sweetly indulgent and she softened the refusal. "By and by, after you are quite well and strong again," she said; and when

a horse-holding boy had been found, she led the way into the bank.

It was Griswold's first visit to the Farmers' and Merchants', and while his companion was speaking to the cashier he was absently contrasting its rather showy interior with the severe plainness of the Bayou State Security; contrasting, and congratulating himself upon the gift of the artistic memory which enabled him to recall with vivid accuracy all the little details of the New Orleans banking house—this notwithstanding the good excuse the observing eye might have had for wandering.

A moment later he found himself bringing up the rear of a procession of three, led by a young woman with a bunch of keys at her girdle. The procession halted for the opening of a massive gate in the steel grille at the rear of the public lobby; after which, with the gate latching itself automatically behind him, Griswold found himself in the grated corridor facing the safety deposit vaults.

"Number three-forty-five-A, please," his companion was saying to the young woman custodian, and he stood aside and admired the workmanship of the complicated time-locks while the two entered the electric-lighted vault and jointly opened one of the multitude of small safes. When Miss Grierson came out, she was carrying a small, japanned document box under her arm, and her eyes were shining with a soft light that was new to the man who was waiting in the corridor. "Come with me to one of the coupon-rooms," she said; and then to the cus-

todian: "You needn't stay; I'll ring when we want to be let out."

Griswold followed in mild bewilderment when she turned aside to one of the little mahogany-lined cells set apart for the use of the safe-holders, saw her press the button which switched the lights on, and mechanically obeyed her signal to close the door. When their complete privacy was assured, she put the japanned box on the tiny table and motioned him to one of the two chairs.

"Do you know why I have brought you here?" she asked, when he was sitting within arm's-reach of the small black box.

"How should I?" he said. "You take me where you please, and when you please, and I ask no questions. I am too well contented to be with you to care very much about the whys and wherefores."

"Oh, how nicely you say it!" she commended, with the frank little laugh which he had come to know and to seek to provoke. She was standing against the opposite cell wall with her shoulders squared and her hands behind her: the pose, whether intentional or natural, was dramatically perfect and altogether bewitching. "I was born to be your fairy godmother, I think," she went on joyously. "Tell me; when you bought your ticket to Wahaska that night in St. Louis, were you meaning to come here to find work?—the bread-and-butter work?"

"No," he admitted; "I had money, then."

"What became of it?"

"I don't know. I suppose it was stolen from me

on the train. It was in a package in one of my suit-cases; and Doctor Farnham said——"

"I know; he told you that we had searched your suit-cases when you were at your worst—thinking we owed it to you and your friends, if you had any."

"Yes; that is what he told me."

"Also, he told you that we didn't find any money?"

"Yes; he told me that, too. We agreed that somebody must have gone through the grips on the train."

"And you let it go at that? Why didn't you tell me, so that we might at least try to find the thief?"

He had quite lost sight of the black box on the table by this time, and was consumed with curiosity to know why she had brought him to such a place to reproach him for his lack of confidence.

"How often are we able to tell the exact 'why' of anything?" he answered evasively. "Perhaps I didn't wish to trouble you—you who had already troubled yourself so generously in behalf of an unknown castaway."

"So you just let the money go?"

"So I just let it go."

She was laughing again and the bedazzling eyes were dancing with delight.

"I told you I was going to prove that you are a philosopher!" she exulted. "Sour old Diogenes himself couldn't have been more superbly indifferent to the goods the gods provide. Open that box on the table, please."

He did it half-absently: at the first sight of the brown-paper packet within, the electric bulb sus-

pended over the table seemed to grow black and the mahogany walls of the tiny room to spin dizzily. Then, with a click that he fancied he could hear, the buzzing mental machinery stopped and reversed itself. A cold sweat, clammy and sickening, started out on him when he realized that the reversal had made him once again the crafty, cornered criminal, ready to fight or fly—or to slay, if a life stood in the way of escape. Without knowing what he did, he closed the box and got upon his feet, eying her with a growing ferocity that he could neither banish nor control.

"I see: you were a little beforehand with the doctor," he said, and he strove to say it naturally; to keep the malignant devil that was whispering in his ear from dictating the tone as well as the words.

"I was, indeed; several days beforehand," she boasted, still joyously exultant.

"You—you opened the package?" he went on, once more pushing the importunate devil aside.

"Naturally. How else would I have known that it was worth locking up?"

Her coolness astounded him. If she knew the whole truth—and the demon at his ear was assuring him that she must know it—she must also know that she was confronting a great peril; the peril of one who voluntarily shuts himself into a trap with the fear-maddened wild thing for which the trap was baited and set. He was steadying himself with a hand on the table when he said: "Well, you opened the package; what did you find out?"

"What did I find out?" He heard her half-hesitant repetition of his query, and for one flitting instant he made sure that he saw the fear of death in the wide-open eyes that were lifted to his. But the next instant the eyes were laughing at him, and she was going on confidently. "Of course, as soon as I untied the string I saw it was money—a lot of money; and you can imagine that I tied it up again, quickly, and didn't lose any more time than I could help in putting it away in the safest place I could think of. Every day since you began to get well, I've been expecting you to say something about it; but as long as you wouldn't, I wouldn't."

Slowly the blood came back into the saner channels, and the whispering demon at his ear grew less articulate. Was she telling the truth? Could it be possible that she had not opened the packet far enough to see and read the damning evidence of the printed bank-slips which, in a very bravado of carelessness, as he now remembered, he had neglected to remove and destroy? He was searching the dark eyes for the naked soul behind them when he ventured again.

"You—you and your father—must have thought it very singular that a sick man should be knocking about the country with so much money carried carelessly in a suit-case?"

"My father knows nothing about it; nor does any one else. And it wasn't my place to gossip or to wonder. I found it, and I took care of it for you. Are you glad, or sorry?"

He took the necessary forward step and stood before her. And his answer was no answer at all.

"Miss Grierson—Margery—are you telling me the truth?—all of it?" he demanded, seeking once again to pinion the soul which lay beyond the deepest depth of the limpid eyes.

Her laugh was as cheerful as a bird song.

"Telling you the truth? How could you suspect me of such a thing! No, my good friend; no woman ever tells a man the whole truth when she can help it. I didn't find your money, and I didn't lock it up in poppa's vault: I am merely playing a part in a deep and diabolical plot to——"

Griswold forgot that he was her poor beneficiary; forgot that she had taken him in as her guest; forgot, in the mad joy of the reactionary moment, everything that he should have remembered—saw nothing, thought of nothing save the flushed face with its glorious eyes and tempting lips: the eyes and lips of the daughter of men.

She broke away from him hotly after he had taken the flushed face between his hands and kissed her; broke away to drop into the chair at the other side of the table, hiding the flashing eyes and the burning cheeks and the quivering lips in the crook of a round arm which made room for itself on the narrow table by pushing the japanned money-box off the opposite edge.

It was the normal Griswold who picked up the box and put it in the other chair, gravely and

methodically. Then he stood before her again with his back to the wall, waiting for what every gentle drop of blood in his veins was telling him he richly deserved. His punishment was long in coming; so long that when he made sure she was crying, he began to invite it.

"Say it," he suggested gently, "you needn't spare me at all. The only excuse I could offer would only make the offence still greater."

She looked up quickly and the dark eyes were swimming. But whether the tears were of anger or only of outraged generosity, he could not tell.

"Then there was an excuse?" she flashed up at him.

"No," he denied, as one who finds the second thought the worthier; "there was no excuse."

She had found a filmy bit of lace-bordered linen at her belt and was furtively wiping her lips with it.

"I thought perhaps you might be able to—to invent one of some sort," she said, and her tone was as colorless as the gray skies of an autumn nightfall. And then, with a childlike appeal in the wonderful eyes: "I think you will have to help me a little—out of your broader experience, you know. What ought I to do?"

His reply came hot from the refining-fire of self-abasement.

"You should write me down as one who wasn't worthy of your loving-kindness and compassion, Miss Grierson. Then you should call the custodian and turn me out."

"But afterward," she persisted pathetically. "There must be an afterward?"

"I am leaving Mereside this evening," he reminded her. "It will be for you to say whether its doors shall ever open to me again."

She took the thin safety-deposit key from her glove and laid it on the table.

"You have made me wish there hadn't been any money," she lamented, with a sorrowful little catch in her voice that stabbed him like a knife. "I haven't so many friends that I can afford to lose them recklessly, Mr. Griswold."

"Damn the money!" he exploded; and the malediction came out of a full heart.

"If you would only say you are sorry," she went on sadly, groping only half-purposefully for the bell-push which would summon the custodian. "You are sorry, aren't you?"

Unconsciously he had taken her former pose, with his back to the wall and his hands behind him.

"I ought to be decent enough to lie to you and say that I am," he returned, hardily. "I know you can't understand; you are too good and innocent to understand. I'm ashamed; that is, the civilized part of me is ashamed; but that is all. Knowing that he ought to be in the dust at your feet, the brutal other-man is unrepentant and riotously jubilant because, for a brief second or two, he was able to break away and——"

Her fingers had found the bell-push and were press-

ing it. When the custodian opened the door, Miss Grierson was her poiseful self again.

"Number three-forty-five-A is Mr. Kenneth Griswold's box, now," she announced briefly. "Please register it in his name, and then help him to put it away and lock it up."

Griswold went through the motions with the key-bearing young woman half-absently. By this time he was fathoms deep in the reactionary undertow. Must the recovered treasure always transform itself into a millstone to drag him down into some new and untried depth of degradation? Thrice he had given it up for lost, and in each instance its reappearance had been the signal for a relapse into primitive barbarism, for a plunge into the moral under-depths out of which he had each time emerged distinctively and definitely the loser. Was it to be always thus? Could it be even remotely possible that in a candidly material world there could still be standing-room for the myths and portents and superstitious traditions?

He was trying to persuade himself that there could not be standing-room when he rejoined Margery—herself the best imaginable refutation of the old-wives' tales—at the gate in the great steel grille. Man-like, he was ready to be forgiven and comforted; and there was at least oblivion in her charming little shudder as the custodian shot the bolts of the gate to let them out.

"*Br-r-r!*" she shivered, "I can never stand here and look at the free people out there without fancy-

ing myself in a prison. It must be a dreadful thing to be shut away behind bolts and bars, forgotten by everybody, and yet yourself unable to forget. Do you ever have such foolish thoughts, Mr. Griswold?"

For one poignant second fear leaped alive again and he called himself no better than a lost man. But the eyes that were lifted to his were the eyes of a questioning child, so guilelessly innocent that he immediately suffered another relapse into the pit of self-despisings.

"You have made me your poor prisoner, Miss Grierson," he said, speaking to his own thought rather than to her question. And when they reached the sidewalk and the trap: "May I bid you good-by here and go to my own place?"

"Of course not!" she protested. "Mr. Raymer is coming to dinner to-night and he will drive you over to Mrs. Holcomb's afterward, if you really think you must go."

And for the first time in their comings and goings she let him lift her to the high driving-seat.

XXIII

CONVERGING ROADS

MATTHEW BROFFIN had been two weeks and half of a third an unobtrusive spy upon the collective activities of the Wahaskan social group which included the Farnhams before he decided that nothing more could be gained by further delay.

By this time he knew all there was to be known about Miss Farnham; the houses she visited, the somewhat limited circle of her intimates and the vastly wider one of her acquaintances, her comings and goings in the town, her preference for church dissipations over the other sort, and for croquet over lawn tennis.

Also, he had a more minute knowledge which would have terrified her if she had suspected that any strange man was keeping an accurately tabulated note-book record of her waking employments. He knew at what hour she breakfasted, what time in the forenoons she spent upon her Chautauqua readings, how much of her day was given to the care of her invalid aunt, and, most important item of all, how, in the afternoons, when her father was at his town office and the invalid was taking a nap in her room, Miss Charlotte was usually alone in

the living-rooms of the two-storied house in Lake Boulevard: practically so for four days out of the seven; actually so on Wednesdays and Fridays when Hilda Larsen, the Swedish maid of all work, had her afternoons off.

Having his own private superstition about Friday, Broffin chose a Wednesday afternoon for his call at the house on the lake front. It was a resplendent day of the early summer which, in the Minnesota latitudes, springs, Minerva-like, full-grown from the nodding head of the wintry Jove of the north. In the doctor's front yard the grass was vividly green, gladioli and jonquils bordered the path with a bravery of color, and the buds of the clambering rose on the porch trellis were swelling to burst their calyxes.

Broffin turned in from the sidewalk and closed the gate noiselessly behind him. If he saw the bravery of colors in the path borders it was only with the outward eye. There was a faint stir on the porch, as of some one parting the leafy screen to look out, but he neither quickened his pace nor slowed it. While he had been three doors away in the lake-fronting street, a small pocket binocular had assured him that the young woman he was going to call upon was sitting in a porch rocker behind the clambering rose, reading a book.

She had risen to meet him by the time he had mounted the steps, and he knew that her first glance was appraisive. He had confidently counted upon being mistaken for a strange patient in search of the doctor, and he was not disappointed.

"You are looking for Doctor Farnham?" she began. "He is at his office—201 Main Street."

Broffin was digging in his pocket for a card. It was not often that he was constrained to introduce himself formally, and for an awkward second or two the search was unrewarded. When he finally found the bit of pasteboard he was explaining verbally.

"I know well enough where your father's office is, but you are the one I wanted to see," he said; and he gave her the round-cornered card with its blazonment of his name and employment.

He was watching her narrowly when she read the name and its underline, and the quick indrawing of the breath and the little shudder that went with it were not thrown away upon him. But the other signs; the pressing of the even teeth upon the lower lip and the coming and going of three straight lines between the half-closed eyes were not so favorable.

"Will you come into the house, Mr. ——" she had to look at the card again to get the name—"Mr. Broffin?" she asked.

"Thank you, Miss; it's plenty good enough out here for me if it is for you," he returned, beginning to fear that the common civilities were giving her time to get behind her defences.

She made way for him on the porch and pointed to a chair, which he took, damning himself morosely when he caught his foot in the porch rug and knocked the book from its resting-place on the railing.

"It is no matter," she said, when he would have

gone outside to recover the book; but he knew from that moment that whatever advantage a fair beginning may give was gone beyond recall.

"I guess we can take it for granted that you know what I want, Miss Farnham," he began abruptly, when he had shifted his chair to face her rocker. "Something like three months ago, or thereabouts, you went into a bank in New Orleans to get a draft cashed. While you were at the paying teller's window a robbery was committed, and you saw it done and saw the man that did it. I've come to get you to tell me the man's name."

If he had thought to carry the defences by direct assault he was quickly made to realize that it could not be done. Miss Farnham's self-possession was quietly convincing when she said:

"I have told it once, in a letter to Mr. Galbraith."

Broffin nodded. "Yes; in a letter that you didn't sign: we'll come to that a little later. The name you gave was John Wesley Gavitt, and you knew that wasn't his right name, didn't you?"

She made the sign of assent without thinking that it might imply the knowing of more.

"It was the name under which he was enrolled in the *Belle Julie's* crew, and it was sufficient to identify him," she countered; adding: "It did identify him. The officers found him and arrested him at St. Louis."

"Yes; and he made his get-away in about fifteen minutes after they had nabbed him, as you probably read in the papers the next morning. He's loose

yet, and most naturally he ain't signing his name 'Gavitt' any more whatever. I've come all the way from New Orleans, and a whole heap farther, to get you to tell me his real name, Miss Farnham."

"Why do you think I can tell you?" was the undisturbed query.

"A lot of little things," said the detective, who was slowly coming to his own in the matter of self-assurance. "In the first place, he spoke to you in the bank, and you answered him. Isn't that so?"

She nodded, but the firm lips remained closed where the lips of another woman might have opened to repeat what had been said at the teller's wicket.

"Then, afterwards, on the boat, before you sent the letter, you talked with him. It was one evening, just at dusk, on the starboard promenade of the saloon-deck: he was comin' down from the pilot-house and you stopped him. That was when he told you what his name was on the steamboat's books, wasn't it?—what?"

She nodded again. "You know so much, it is surprising that you don't know it all, Mr. Broffin," she commented, with gentle sarcasm.

"The one thing I don't know is the thing you're goin' to tell me—his real name," he insisted. "That's what I've come here for."

In spite of her inexperience, which, in Mr. Broffin's field, was no less than total, Charlotte Farnham had imagination, and with it a womanly zest for the matching of wits with a man whose chief occupation was the measuring of his own wit against the subtle

cleverness of criminals. Therefore she accepted the challenge.

"I did my whole duty at the time, Mr. Broffin," she demurred, with a touch of coldness in her voice. "If you were careless enough to let him escape you at St. Louis, you shouldn't come to me. I might say very justly that it was never any affair of mine."

Matthew Broffin's gifts were subtle only in his dealings with other men; but he was shrewd enough to know that his last and best chance with a woman lay in an appeal to her fears.

"I don't know what made you write this letter, in the first place," he said, taking the well-thumbed paper from his coat pocket; "but I know well enough now why you didn't sign it, and why you didn't put the man's real name in it. You—you and him—fixed it up between you so that you could say to yourself afterwards what you've just said to me—that you'd done your duty. But you haven't finished doin' your duty, yet. The law says——"

"I know very well what the law says," was her baffling rejoinder; "I have taken the trouble to find out since I came home. I am not hiding your criminal."

Broffin was trying to gain a little ease by tilting his chair. But the house wall was too close behind him.

"People will say that you are helpin' to hide him as long as you won't tell his real name—what?" he grated.

"You still think I could tell you that, if I chose?"

she said, wilfully misleading him, or at least allowing him to mislead himself.

"I don't think anything about it: I *know!* You'd met him somewhere before that day in the bank—before you knew he was goin' to turn gentleman hold-up. That's why you don't want to give up his real name."

She had risen in answer to the distant chatter of an electric bell, and in self-defence, Broffin had to grope on the floor for his hat and stand up, too.

"I think my aunt is calling and I shall have to go in," she said, calmly dismissing him. "You'll excuse me, I am sure, Mr. Broffin."

"In just one second, Miss Farnham. Ain't you goin' to tell me that fellow's name?"

"No."

"Wait a minute. I'm an officer of the law, and I could arrest you and take you to New Orleans on what evidence I've got. How about that?—what?"

There was good fighting blood on the Farnham side, notwithstanding the kindly Doctor Bertie's peaceful avocation, and the calm gray eyes that met Broffin's were militantly angry when the retort came.

"If I had a brother, Mr. Broffin, he would be able to answer you better than I can!" she flamed out. "Let me pass, please!"

It was not often that Broffin lost his head or his temper, but both were gone when he struck back.

"That'll be all right, too!" he broke out harshly, blocking the way to force her to listen to him. "You

think you've bluffed me, don't you?—what? Let me tell you: some fine day this duck whose name isn't Gavitt will turn up here—to see you; then I'll nab him. If you find out where he is, and write to him not to come, it'll be all the same; he'll come anyway, and when he does come, I'll get him!"

When Miss Farnham had gone in and there was nothing left for him to do but to compass his own disappearance, Broffin went away, telling himself with many embellishments that for once in his professional career he had made an ass of himself. He had made a sorry botch of a measurably simple detail, to say nothing of letting his temper push him into the final foolish boast which might easily defeat him.

None the less, he was able to set some few gains over against the one critical loss—if one may be said to lose what he has never had. Failing to learn the true name and place of the Bayou State Security robber, he told himself that he had established beyond question the correctness of his hypothesis. The doctor's daughter knew the man; she had known him before the robbery; she was willing to be his accomplice to the extent of her ability. There was only one explanation of this attitude. In Broffin's wording of it, Miss Farnham was "gone on him," if not openly, at least to such an extent as to make her anxious to shield him.

That being the case, Broffin set it down as a fact as good as accomplished that the man would sooner

or later come to Wahaska. The detective's knowledge of masculine human nature was as profoundly acute as the requirements of his calling demanded. With a woman like Miss Farnham for the lure, he could be morally certain that his man would some time fling caution, or even a written prohibition, to the winds, and walk into the trap.

This misfire of Broffin's happened upon a Wednesday, which, in its calendar placing, chanced to be three weeks to a day after Griswold had left Mereside to settle himself studiously in two quiet upper rooms in the Widow Holcomb's house in upper Shawnee Street.

That it was also a day of other coincidences will appear in the casting up of the items on the page of events.

For one thing, it marked the formal opening of the De Soto Inn for the summer season; the De Soto being the resort hotel spoken of by the clerk of the Hotel Chouteau in the little ante-dinner talk which had given Griswold his first outline sketch of Wahaska. For another, the special train from the far South arriving at noon and bearing the first detachment of the Inn's guests, had for one of its Pullman passengers an elderly gentleman with a strongly marked Scottish face; a gentleman with the bushy white eyebrows of age, the long upper lip of caution, the drooping eyelid of irascibility, and the bearing of a man of routine; in other words, Mr. Andrew Galbraith, faring northward on his customary summer vacation, which—the fates in-

tervening—he had this time determined to spend at the Wahaskan resort.

For a third item, it was at three o'clock of this same Wednesday that Raymer came out of Jasper Grierson's bank with his head down and a cloud on his brow; the cloud dating back to an interview just closed, a short and rather brittle conference with the bank's president held in Jasper Grierson's private room, with the president sitting at ease in his huge arm-chair and his visitor standing, quite destitute of ease, at the desk-end.

A little farther along, this third item dovetailed with a fourth and fifth. Raymer, dropping into a friend's office to use the telephone, chanced upon a crossed wire. He had called up Mrs. Holcomb, and while he was waiting for the widow to summon Griswold from his up-stairs den, there was a confused skirling of bells and Raymer, innocently eavesdropping, overheard part of a conversation between two well-known voices; namely, the voices of Miss Charlotte Farnham and her father. The talk was neither confidential, nor of any special significance. Miss Farnham was explaining that she had heard the bell, but could not answer promptly because she had had a caller; and the doctor was telling her that it was no matter—that he merely wanted to let her know that he was going to bring a dinner guest, the guest prospective being his late patient, Mr. Kenneth Griswold.

The mention of Griswold's name reminded Raymer of his own affair, and he became suddenly

anxious to have the connection with the Widow Holcomb's house renewed. When the crossed wire was plugged out, Griswold was ready and waiting.

"I was afraid you might be out somewhere, and I want to have a pow-wow with you," said Raymer, when the reassuring voice came over the wire. "Can you give me a little time if I drive around?" And when the prompt assent came: "All right; thank you. I'll be with you in a pair of minutes."

Raymer's horse was only a short half-square away, hitched in front of the Winnebago House, and he went to get it. But at the instant of unhitching, Miss Grierson's trap was driven up and the untying of knots paused while he stepped from the curb to stand at the wheel of the modish equipage.

"You are getting to be as bad as all the others," was the greeting he got from the high driving-seat. "You haven't been at Mereside for an age—only once since the night you took Mr. Griswold away from us. By the way, what has become of Mr. Griswold? He doesn't show himself in public much oftener than you do."

"I think he has been getting to work on his writing," said Raymer, good-naturedly apologizing for his friend. "He'll come down out of the clouds after a little." And then, before he could stop it, out came the bit of unchartered information: "I understand he dines at Doctor Bertie's to-night."

The young iron-founder was looking up into the eyes of beguiling when he said this, and, being a

mere man, he wondered what made them flash and then grow suddenly fathomless and brooding.

"When you see him, tell him that we are still on earth over at Mereside," said the magnate's daughter pertly; and a moment later Raymer was free to keep his appointment with Griswold.

All in all, the little interruption had consumed no more than five minutes, but the time interval was sufficient to form another link in the chain of Wednesday incidents. For, as Raymer was turning out of Main Street into Shawnee, he narrowly missed running over a heavy-set man with a dark face and drooping mustaches; a pedestrian whose preoccupation seemed so great as to make him quite oblivious to street crossings and passing vehicles until Raymer pulled his horse back into the shafts and shouted.

When the man looked up, Raymer recognized him as the stranger from the South who was stopping at the Winnebago House and who gave himself out as a Louisiana lumberman open to conviction on the subject of Minnesota pine lands as an investment. But he had no means of knowing that Broffin's momentary preoccupation was chargeable to a fruitless interview lately concluded; or that in driving away to the house three squares up the street he was bridging the narrow gap between a man-hunter and his quarry—a gap which had suddenly grown into a chasm for the man-hunter himself.

One more small coincidence will serve to total the items on the Wednesday page. If Broffin had not stopped to look after the man who had so nearly

run him down, he might not have been crossing Main Street in front of the Winnebago at the precise instant when Miss Grierson, with young Dahlgren in the second seat of the trap, came around the square and pulled up to let her horse drink at the public fountain.

"Who is that Bitter-Creekish-looking man crossing over to the Winnebago House?" asked Miss Grierson of her seatmate, indicating Broffin with a wave of the whip, and skilfully making the query sound like the voicing of the idlest curiosity.

"Fellow named Broffin, from Louisiana," said Dahlgren, who, as assistant editor of the *Daily Wahaskan*, knew everybody. "Says he's in the lumber business down there, but, 'I doubt it,' said the carpenter, and shed a bitter tear."

"Why do you doubt it?" queried Miss Grierson, neatly flicking a fly from the horse's back with the tip of the whiplash.

"Oh, on general principles, I guess. You wouldn't say he had any of the ear-marks of a business man."

"What kind of ear-marks has he got?" persisted Miss Grierson—merely to make talk, as Dahlgren decided.

"I don't know. We were talking about him around at the club the other night, and Sheffield—he's from Kentucky, you know—thought he remembered the name as the name of a 'moonshine' raider he'd heard of down in his home State."

"A moonshine raider? What is that?" By this

time Miss Margery's curiosity was less inert than it had been, or had seemed to be, at first.

"A deputy marshal, you know; a sort of Government policeman and detective rolled into one. He looks it, don't you think?"

Miss Grierson did not say what she thought, then, or later, when she set Dahlgren down at the door of his newspaper office in Sioux Avenue. But still later, two hours later, in fact, she gave a brief audience in the Mereside library to a small, barefooted boy whose occupation was sufficiently indicated by the bundle of evening papers hugged under one arm.

"Well, Johnnie; what did you find out?" she asked.

"Ain't had time," said the boy. "But he ain't no milyunaire lumber-shooter, I'll bet a nickel. I sold him a pape' jes' now, down by Dutchie's lumber yard, and I ast him what kind o' lumber that was in the pile by the gate. He didn't know, no more'n a goat."

Miss Margery filliped a coin in the air and the newsboy caught it dexterously.

"That will do nicely for a beginning, Johnnie," she said sweetly. "Come and see me every once in a while, and perhaps there'll be more little white cart-wheels for you. Only don't tell; and don't let him catch you. That's all."

XXIV

THE FORWARD LIGHT

During the days which followed his setting up of the standard of independence in Mrs. Holcomb's second-floor front, Griswold found himself entering upon a new world—a world corresponding with gratifying fidelity to that prefigured future which he had struck out in the waking hours of his first night on the main-deck of the *Belle Julie*.

Wahaska, as a fortunate field for the post-graduate course in Experimental Humanity, was all that his fancy had pictured it. It was neither so small as to scant the variety of subjects, nor so large as to preclude the possibility of grasping them in their entirety. In strict accord with the forecast, it promised to afford the writing craftsman's happy medium in surroundings: it would reproduce, in miniature, perhaps, but none the less in just proportions, the social problems of the wider world; and for a writer's seclusion the village quiet of upper Shawnee Street was all that could be desired.

When he came to go about in the town, as he did daily after the pleasant occupation of refurnishing his study and bed-room was a pleasure past, he found that in some mysterious manner his fame had

preceded him. Everybody seemed to know who he was; to be able to place him as a New Yorker, as an author in search of health, or local color or environment or some other technical quality not to be found in the crowded cities; to be able to place him, also, as Miss Margery Grierson's friend and beneficiary—which last, he surmised, was his best passport to the good graces of his fellow-townsmen.

Coincidently he discovered that, in the same mysterious manner, everybody seemed to know that he was, in the Wahaskan phrase, "well-fixed." Here, again, he guessed that something might be credited to Margery. Beyond a hint to Raymer, he had told no one of the comfortable assurance against want lying snugly secure in the small strong-box in the Farmers' and Merchants' safety vault, and he was reasonably certain that Raymer could not have passed the hint so fast and so far as the town-wide limits to which the fact of the "well-fixed" phrase had spread.

All this was very nourishing, not to say stimulating, to the starved soul of a proletary. Not in any period of the past had he so fully understood that an acute appreciation of the wrongs of the race is no bar to an equally acute hungering and thirsting after the commonplace flesh-pots, or to a very primitive and soul-satisfying enjoyment of the same when they were to be had. Nevertheless, the reaction into self-indulgence proved to be only temporary. God had been good to him, enabling him to realize in miraculous fulfilment the ideal environment and opportu-

nity: therefore he would do his part, proclaiming the holy war and fighting, single-handed if need be, the battle of the weak against the strong.

So ran the renewed determination, dusted off and re-pedestaled after many days. As to the manner of conducting the war against inequality and the crime of plutocracy, the plan of campaign had been sufficiently indicated in that white-hot moment of high resolves on the cargo-deck of the *Belle Julie*. For the propaganda, there was his book; for the demonstration, he would put the sacred fund into some industry where the weight of it would give him the casting vote in all questions involving the rights of the workers. It was absurdly simple, and he wondered that none of the sociological reformers whose books he had read had anticipated him in the discovery of such an obviously logical point of attack.

With the re-writing of the book fairly begun, he was already looking about for the practical opportunity when the growing friendship with Edward Raymer promised to offer an opening exactly fulfilling the experimental requirements. Raymer had over-enlarged his plant and was needing more capital. So much Griswold had gathered from the talk of the street; and some of Raymer's half-confidences had led him to suspect that the need was, or was likely to become, imperative. It was only the finer quality of friendship that had hitherto kept him from offering help before it was asked, and thus far he had contented himself with hinting to Raymer that he had money to invest. From every point of view

a partnership with the young iron-founder promised to afford the golden opportunity. The industry was comparatively small and self-contained; and Raymer was himself openly committed to the cause of uplifting. Griswold waited patiently; he was still waiting on the Wednesday afternoon when Raymer called him over the telephone and made the appointment for a meeting at the house in Shawnee Street.

"Your 'pair of minutes' must have found something to grow upon," laughed the patient waiter, when Raymer, finding Mrs. Holcomb's front door open, had climbed the stair to the newly established literary workshop. "I've had time to smoke a pipe and write a complete paragraph since you called up."

Raymer flung himself into a chair at the desk-end and reached for a pipe in the curiously carved rack which had been one of Griswold's small extravagances in the refurnishing.

"Yes," he said; "Margery Grierson drove up while I was unhitching, and I had to stop and talk to her. Which reminds me: she says you're giving Mereside the go-by since you set up for yourself. Are you?"

"Not intentionally," Griswold denied; and he let it stand at that.

"I shouldn't, if I were you," Raymer advised. "Margery Grierson is any man's good friend; and pretty soon you'll be meeting people who will lift their eyebrows when you speak of her. You mustn't make her pay for that."

"I'm not likely to," was the sober rejoinder. "My debt to Miss Grierson is a pretty big one, Raymer; bigger than you suspect, I imagine."

"I'm glad to hear you put the debt where it belongs, leaving her father out of it. You don't owe him anything; not even a cup of cold water. There's a latter-day buccaneer for you!" he went on, warming to his subject like a man with a sore into which salt has been freshly rubbed. "That old timber-wolf wouldn't spare his best friend—allowing that anybody could be his friend. By Jove! he's making me sweat blood, all right!"

"How is that?" asked Griswold.

"I've been on the edge of telling you two or three times, but next to a quitter I do hate the fellow who puts his fingers into a trap and then squawks when the trap nips him. Grierson has got me down and he is about to cut my throat, Griswold."

"Tell me about it," said the one who had been patiently waiting to be told.

"It begins back a piece, but I'll brief it for you. I suppose you've been told how Grierson came here a few years ago with a wad of money and a large and healthy ambition to own the town?"

Griswold nodded.

"Well, he has come pretty close to making a go of it. What he doesn't own or control wouldn't make much of a town by itself. A year ago he tried to get a finger into my little pie. He wanted to reorganize the Raymer Foundry and Machine Works, and offered to furnish the additional capital and

take fifty-one per cent of the reorganization stock. Naturally, I couldn't see it. My father had left the plant as an undivided legacy to my mother, my sister, and myself; and while we haven't been getting rich out of it, we've managed to hold our own and to grow a little. Don't let me bore you."

"You couldn't do that if you should try. Go on."

"This spring Wahaska began to feel the boost of the big crop year. Everything was on the upward slant, and I thought we ought to move along with other people. Before the snow was off the ground we had hit the capacity limit in the old plant and the only thing to do was to enlarge. I borrowed the money at Grierson's bank and did it."

"And you can't make the enlarged plant pay?"

"Oh, yes, it's paying very well, indeed; we're earning dividends, all right. But in the money matter I simply played the fool and let Grierson cinch me. As I've told you more than once, I'm an engineer and no finance shark. My borrow at the bank was one hundred thousand dollars, and there was a verbal understanding that it was to be repaid out of the surplus earnings, piecemeal. I told Grierson that I should need a year or more, and he didn't object."

"This was all in conversation?" said Griswold: "no writing?"

Raymer made a wry face.

"Don't rub it in. I'm admitting that I was all the different kinds of a fool. There was no definite time limit mentioned. I was to give my personal

notes and put up the family stock as collateral. A day or two later, when I went around to close the deal, the trap was standing wide open for me and a baby might have seen it. Grierson said he had proposed the loan to his directors, and that they had kicked on taking the stock as collateral. He said they wanted a mortgage on the plant."

Griswold nodded. "Which brought on more talk," he suggested.

"Which brought on a good bit more talk. Really, it didn't make any intrinsic difference. Stock collateral or property collateral, the bank would have us by the throat until the debt should be paid. But you know how women are: my mother would about as soon sign her own death warrant as to put her name on a mortgage; so there we were—blocked. Grierson was as smooth as oil; said he wanted to help me out, and was willing to stretch his authority to do it. Then he sprung the trap."

"Having got you just where he wanted you," put in the listener.

"Yes; having got me down. The new proposition was apparently a mere modification of the first one. I was an accredited customer of the bank, like other business men of the town, and as such I could ask for an extension of credit on accommodation paper, and Grierson, as president, was at liberty to grant it if he saw fit. He offered to take my paper without an endorser if I would cover his personal risk with my stock collateral, assigning it, not to the bank, but to him. I fell for it like a woolly

sheep. The stock transfers were made, and I signed a note for one hundred thousand dollars, due in sixty days; Grierson explaining that two months was the bank's usual limit on accommodation paper—which is true enough—but giving me to understand that a renewal and an extension of time would be merely a matter of routine."

Griswold was shaking his head sympathetically. "I can guess the rest," he said. "Grierson is preparing to swallow you whole."

"He has as good as done it," was the dejected reply. "The note falls due to-morrow; and, as I happened to be uptown this afternoon, I thought I would drop in and pay the discount and renew the paper. To tell the truth, I'd been getting more nervous the more I thought of it; and I didn't dare let it go to the final moment. Grierson shot me through the heart. He gave me a cock-and-bull story about some bank examiner's protest, and told me I must be prepared to take up the paper to-morrow. He knew perfectly well that he had me by the throat. I had checked out every dollar of the loan, and a good bit of our own balance in addition, paying the building and material bills."

"Of course you reminded him of his agreement?"

"Sure; and he sawed me off short: said that any business man borrowing money on accommodation paper knew that it was likely to be called in on the expiration date; that an extension is really a new transaction, which the bank is at liberty to refuse to enter. Oh, he gave it to me cold and clammy,

sitting back in his big chair and staring up at me through the smoke of a fat black cigar while he did it!"

"And then?" prompted Griswold.

"Then I remembered the mother and sister, Kenneth, and did what I would have died rather than do for myself—I begged like a dog. But I might as well have gone outside and butted my head against the brick wall of the bank."

Griswold forgot his own real, though possibly indirect, obligation to Jasper Grierson.

"That is where you made a mistake: you should have told him to go to hell with his money!" was his acrid comment. And then: "How near can you come to lifting this note to-morrow, Raymer?"

"'Near' isn't the word. Possibly I might sweep the corners and gather up twelve or fifteen thousand dollars."

"That will do," said the querist, shortly. "Make it ten thousand, and I'll contribute the remaining ninety."

Raymer sprang out of his chair as if its padded arms had been suddenly turned into high-voltage electrodes.

"You will?—you'll do that for me, Griswold?" he said, with a queer stridency in his voice that made the word-craftsman, always on the watch for apt similes, think of a choked chicken. But Raymer was swallowing hard and trying to go on. "By Jove—it's the most generous thing I ever heard of! --but I can't let you do it. I haven't a thing in

the world to offer you but the stock, and that may not be worth the paper it is printed on if Jasper Grierson has made up his mind to break me."

"Sit down again and let us thresh it out," said Griswold. "How much of a Socialist are you, Raymer?"

The young ironmaster sat down, gasping a little at the sudden wrenching aside of the subject.

"Why, I don't know; enough to want every man to have a square deal, I guess."

"Including the men in your shops?"

"Putting them first," was the prompt correction. "It was my father's policy, and it has been mine. We have never had any labor troubles."

"You pay fair wages?"

"We do better than that. A year ago, I introduced a modified plan of profit-sharing."

Griswold's eyes were lighting up with the altruistic fires.

"Once in awhile, Raymer, a thing happens so fortuitously as to fairly compel a belief in the higher powers that our fathers included in the word 'Providence'," he said, almost solemnly. "You have described exactly an industrial situation which seems to me to offer a solution of the whole vexed question of master and man, and to be a seed-sowing which is bound to be followed by an abundant and most humanizing harvest. Ever since I began to study, even in a haphazard way, the social system under which we sweat and groan, I've wanted in on a job like yours. I still want in. Will you take me as a silent partner, Raymer? I'm not making it a con-

dition, mind you: come here any time after ten o'clock to-morrow, and you'll find the money waiting for you. But I do hope you won't turn me down."

Raymer was gripping the arms of his chair again, but this time they were not unpleasantly electrified.

"If I had only myself to consider, I shouldn't keep you waiting a second," he returned, heartily. "But it may take a little time to persuade my mother and sister. If they could only know you"—then, forgetting the crossed wire and his late overhearings —"why can't you come out to dinner with me to-night?"

"For the only reason that would make me refuse; I have a previous bidding. But I'll be glad to go some other day. There is no hurry about this business matter; take all the time you need—after you have made Mr. Grierson take his claws out of you."

Raymer had filled the borrowed pipe again and was pulling at it reflectively. "About this partnership; what would be your notion?" he asked.

"The simplest way is always the best. Increase your capital stock and let me in for as much as my ninety thousand dollars will buy," said the easily satisfied investor. "We'll let it go at that until you've had time to think it over, and talk it over with your mother and sister."

The iron-founder got up and reached for his hat.

"You are certainly the friend in need, Griswold, if ever there was one," he said, gripping the hand of leave-taking as if he would crack the bones in it. "But there is one thing I'm going to ask you, and you mustn't take offense: this ninety thousand;

could you afford to lose it?—or is it your whole stake in the game?"

Griswold's smile was the ironmaster's assurance that he had not offended.

"It is practically my entire stake—and I can very well afford to lose it in the way I have indicated. You may call that a paradox, if you like, but both halves of it are true."

"Then there is one other thing you ought to know, and I'm going to tell it now," Raymer went on. "We do a general foundry and machine business, but a good fifty per cent of our profit comes from the Wahaska & Pineboro Railroad repair work, which we have had ever since the road was opened."

Griswold was smiling again. "Why should I know that, particularly?" he asked.

"Because it is rumored that Jasper Grierson has been quietly absorbing the stock and bonds of the road, and if he means to remove me from the map——"

"I see," was the reply. "In that case you'll need a partner even worse than you do now. You can't scare me off that way. Shall I look for you at ten to-morrow?"

"At ten to the minute," said the rescued plunger; and he went down-stairs so full of mingled thankfulness and triumph that he mistook Doctor Farnham's horse for his own at the hitching-post two doors away, and was about to get into the doctor's buggy before he discovered his mistake.

XXV

THE BRIDGE OF JEHENNAM

Doctor Farnham had been about to make his daily call upon old Mrs. Breda, two doors up the street from the Widow Holcomb's, when he had climbed the stair of literary aspirations to give the convalescent his dinner bidding.

Griswold had accepted gratefully on the spur of the moment; and it was not until after Raymer had come and gone that sober second thought began to point out the risk he would run in meeting Charlotte Farnham face to face under conditions which would give her the best conceivable opportunity to recognize him, if recognition were possible.

The more he thought of it, the more he regretted his haste in consenting to incur the risk. Reflectively weighing the chances for and against, he made sure that in characterizing the young woman whose life-thread had been so strangely tangled with his own he had not overrated her intelligence. Giving heredity its due, with the keen-witted little physician for her father she could scarcely fail to measure up to the standard of those whose gifts are apperceptive. For many days she had had ample opportunity to familiarize herself with all the little identifying individualities of the deck-hand: reasoning from

cause to effect, it might be assumed that her crushing responsibility had driven her to make use of it. Having recognized him once, under conditions far less favorable than those he was about to hazard, was it not more than probable that she would be able to do it again?

Griswold took a final look at himself in his dressing-case mirror before going to keep his evening appointment at the doctor's down-town office. It was comfortably reassuring. So far as he could determine, there was little in the clean-shaven, square-shouldered, correctly garmented young fellow who faced him in the mirror to suggest either the bearded outcast of New Orleans or the unkempt and toil-soddened roustabout of the *Belle Julie*. If only she had not made him speak to her: he had a sharp conviction that the greatest of all the hazards lay in the chance that she might remember his voice.

He found the cheery little doctor waiting for him when he had walked the few squares to the Main Street office.

"I was beginning to be afraid you were going to be fashionably late," said the potential host; and then, with a humorous glance for the correct garmenting: "Regalia, heh? Hasn't Miss Grierson told you that Wahaska is still hopelessly unable to live up to the dress-coat and standing collar? I'm sure she must have. But never mind; climb into the buggy and we'll let old Bucephalus take us around to see if the neighbors have brought in anything good to eat."

The drive was a short one, and it ended at the gate through which Matthew Broffin had preceded by only a few hours the man whose eventual appearance at the Farnham home he had so confidently predicted. As at many another odd moment when there had been nothing better to do, Broffin was once more shadowing the house in which, first or last, he expected to trap his amateur MacHeath; and when the buggy was halted at the carriage step he was near enough to mark and recognize the doctor's companion.

"Not this time," he muttered, sourly, when the two had passed together up the gravelled path and the host was fitting his latch-key to the front door. "It's only the sick man that writes books. I wonder what sort of a book he thinks he's going to write in this inforgotten, turkey-trodden, come-along village of the Reuben yaps!"

Griswold, waiting on the porch while Doctor Farnham fitted his key, had a nerve-tingling shiver of apprehension when the latch yielded with a click and he found himself under the hall lantern formally shaking hands with the statuesque young woman of the many imaginings. It gave him a curious thrill of mingled terror and joy to find her absolutely unchanged. Having, for his own part, lived through so many experiences since that final glimpse of her standing on the saloon-deck guards of the *Belle Julie* at St. Louis, the distance in time seemed almost immeasurable.

"You are very welcome to Home Nook, Mr. Gris-

wold; we have been hearing about you for many weeks," she was saying when he had relinquished the firm hand and was hanging his coat and hat on the hall-rack. And then, with a half-embarrassed laugh: "I am afraid we are dreadful gossips; all Wahaska has been talking about you, you know, and wondering how it came to acquire you."

"It hasn't acquired anything very valuable," was the guest's modest disclaimer, its readiness arising out of a grateful easing of strains now that the actual face-to-face ordeal had safely passed its introductory stage. "And you mustn't say a word against your charming little city, Miss Farnham," he went on. "It is the friendliest, most hospitable——"

The doctor's daughter was interrupting with an enthusiastic show of applause.

"Come on out to dinner, both of you," she urged; and then to Griswold: "I want you to say all those nice things to Aunt Fanny, and as many more as you can think of. She has never admitted for a single moment that Wahaska can be compared with any one of a dozen New Hampshire villages she could name."

In the progress to the cozy, home-like dining-room, Griswold found himself at once in an atmosphere of genuine comfort and refinement; the refinement which speaks of generations of good breeding chastened and purified by the limitations of a slender purse; in the present instance the purse of the good little doctor whose attempted charity in the matter of his own fee was fresh in the mind of the

castaway. Griswold had the writing craftsman's ingathering eye: he saw that the furnishings were frugally well-worn, that the sitting-room rug was country-woven, and that the spotless dining-room napery was soft and pliable with age. The contrast between the Farnham home and the ornate mansion three streets away on the lake front was strikingly apparent; as cleanly marked as that between Margery Grierson and the sweetly serene and conventional young person who was introducing him to her aunt across the small oval dining-table.

So far, all was going well. Griswold, with a pleasant word for the frail little woman opposite and a retort in kind now and then for the doctor's raillery, still had time to be narrowly observant of the signs and omens. But a little later, when the Swedish maid was serving the meat course, he had his first warning shock. Through the bouillon and the fish the doctor had borne the brunt of the table-talk, joking the guest on his humiliating descent from Mereside and the luxuries to a country doctor's table, and laughing at Griswold's half-hearted attempts to decry the luxuries. What word or phrase or trick of speech it was that served to stir the sleeping memories, Griswold could not guess; but it became suddenly apparent that the memories were stirring. In the midst of a half-uttered direction to the serving-maid, Miss Farnham stopped abruptly, and Griswold could feel her gaze, wide-eyed and half-terrified, seemingly fixed upon him.

It was all over in the turning of a leaf: there had

been no break in the doctor's genial raillery, and the breathless little pause at the other end of the table was only momentary. But Griswold fancied that there was a subtle change in the daughter's attitude toward him dating from the moment of interruptions.

Farther along, he decided that the change was in himself, and was merely the outcropping of the morbid vein which persists, with more or less continuity, in all the temperamental workings of the human mind. When the dinner was over and there was an adjournment to the sitting-room, little Miss Gilman presently found her reading-glasses and a book; and the doctor, in the act of filling two long-stemmed pipes for his guest and himself, was called away professionally. Griswold saw himself confronting the really crucial stage of the ordeal, and prudence was warning him that it would be safer to make his adieux and to go with his host. It was partly Miss Farnham's protest, but more his own determination to prove the bridge of peril to the uttermost, that made him stay.

Miss Gilman, least obtrusive of chaperones, had been peacefully napping for a good half-hour in her low rocker under the reading-lamp, and the pictures in a thick quarto of Gulf Coast views had pleasantly filled the interval for the two who were awake, when Griswold finally assured himself that the danger of recognition was a danger past. As a mental analyst he knew that the opening of each fresh door in the house of present familiarity was automatically clos-

ing other doors opening upon the past; and it came to him with a little flush of the seer's exaltation that once again his prefigurings were finding their exact fulfilment. In a spirit of artistic daring he yielded to a sudden impulse, as one crossing the flimsiest of bridges may run and leap to prove that his theory of safety-stresses is a sufficient guarantee of his own immunity.

"You were speaking of first impressions of places," he said, while they were still turning the leaves of the picture-book. "Are you a believer in the absolute correctness of first impressions?"

"I don't know," was the thoughtful reply; but its after-word was more definite: "As to places, I'm not sure that the first impression always persists; in a few instances I am quite certain it hasn't. I didn't like the Gulf Coast at all, at first; it seemed so foreign and different and unhomelike. As to people, however——"

She paused, and Griswold entered the breach hardily.

"As to people, you are less easily converted from the original prejudice—or prepossession. So am I. I have learned to place the utmost confidence in the first impression. In my own case it is invariably correct, and if for any reason whatever I suffer any later characterization to take its place, I am always the loser."

She was regarding him curiously over the big book which still lay open between them.

"Is that a part of the writing gift?" she asked.

"No, not specially; most people have it in some more or less workable quantity, though for many it expresses itself only in a vague attraction or repulsion."

"I've had that feeling," she answered quickly.

"I know," he affirmed. "There have been times when, with every reasonable fibre in you urging you to believe the evil, a still stronger impulse has made you believe in the good."

"How can you know that?" she asked; and again he saw in the expressive eyes the flying signals of indeterminate perplexity and apprehension.

Resolutely he pressed the hazardous experiment to its logical conclusion. Once for all, he must know if this young woman with the sympathetic voice and the goddess-like pose could, even under suggestion, be led to link up the past with the present.

"It is my trade to know," he said quietly, closing the book of views and laying it aside. "There have been moments in your life when you would have given much to be able to decide a question of duty or expediency entirely irrespective of your impressions. Isn't that so?"

For one flitting instant he thought he had gone too far. In the hardy determination to win all or lose all, he had been holding her eyes steadily, as the sure mirror in which he should be able to read his sentence, of acquittal or of condemnation. This time there was no mistaking the sudden widening of the pupils to betray the equally sudden awakening of womanly terror.

"Don't be afraid," he began, and he had come thus far on the road to open confession when he saw that she was not looking at him; she was looking past him toward one of the windows giving upon the porch. "What is it?" he demanded, turning to look with her.

"It was a man—he was looking in at the window!" she returned in low tones. "I thought I saw him once before; but this time I am certain!"

Griswold sprang from his chair and a moment later was letting himself out noiselessly through the hall door. There was nothing stirring on the porch. The windless night was starlit and crystal clear, and the silence was profound. As soon as the glare of the house lights was out of his eyes, Griswold made a quick circuit of the porch. Not satisfied with this, he widened the circle to take in the front yard, realizing as he did it that a dozen men might easily play hide-and-seek with a single searcher in the shrubbery. He was still groping among the bushes, and Miss Farnham had come to the front door, when the doctor's buggy appeared under the street lights and was halted at the home hitching-post.

"Hello, Mr. Griswold; is that you?" called the cheery one, when he saw a bareheaded man beating the covers in his front yard.

Griswold met his host at the gate and walked up the path with him.

"Miss Charlotte thought she saw some one at one of the front windows," he explained; and a moment afterward the daughter was telling it for herself.

"I saw him twice," she insisted; "once while we were at dinner, and again just now. The first time I thought I might be mistaken, but this time——"

Griswold was laughing silently and inwardly deriding his gifts when, under cover of the doctor's return, he made decent acknowledgments for benefits bestowed and took his departure. On the pleasant summer-night walk to upper Shawnee Street he was congratulating himself upon the now quite complete fulfilment of the wishing prophecy. Miss Farnham was going to prove to be all that the most critical maker of studies from life could ask in a model; a supremely perfect original for the character of *Fidelia* in the book. Moreover, she would be his touchstone for the truths and verities; even as Margery Grierson might, if she were forgiving enough to let by-gones be by-gones, hold the mirror up to Nature and the pure humanities. Moreover, again, whatever slight danger there might have been in a possibility of recognition was a danger outlived. If the first meeting had not stirred the sleeping memories in Miss Farnham, subsequent ones would serve only to widen the gulf between forgetfulness and recollection by just such distances as the Wahaskan Griswold should traverse in leaving behind him the deckhand of the *Belle Julie*.

Thus the complacent, musing upper thought in the mind and on the lips of the proletary as he wended his way through the quiet and well-nigh deserted streets to the older part of the town. How much it might have been modified if he had known that the

man whose face Miss Farnham had seen at the window was silently tracking him through the tree-shadowed streets is a matter for conjecture. Also, it is to be presumed that much, if not all, of the complacency would have vanished if he could have been an unseen listener in the Farnham sitting-room, dating from the time when little Miss Gilman pattered off to bed, leaving the father and daughter sitting together under the reading-lamp.

At first their talk was entirely of the window apparition; the daughter insisting upon its reality, and the father trying to push it over into the limbo of things imagined. Driven finally to give all the reasons for her belief in the realities, Charlotte related the incident of the afternoon.

"You may remember that I told you over the 'phone that I had a caller this afternoon," she began.

The doctor did remember it, and said so.

"You can imagine how frightened I was when I tell you that it was a man—a detective from New Orleans who has, or at least who says he has, been travelling thousands of miles to find me."

Doctor Bertie was tickling his bearded chin thoughtfully. "He should have come to me first," he said, frowning a little at the invasion of his home. "It was about that bank robbery, I suppose?"

"Yes; he thought I could tell him the man's real name. It seems that they have no identity clew to work upon. I knew at the time that 'Gavitt' was an assumed name; the man as good as told me so,

you remember. This Mr. Broffin wouldn't believe that I couldn't tell him the real name, and along toward the last he grew quite angry and threatening. He insisted upon it that I knew the robber—that I had known him before the crime was committed; and he intimated pretty broadly that I am still in communication with him. Of course, it is all very absurd; but it is also very annoying to think that somebody is spying upon you all the time. I didn't want to speak of it before Mr. Griswold; but it was this detective who came twice to look in at our windows this evening."

By this time the good Doctor Bertie had become the indignant Doctor Bertie.

"We can't have that at all!" he said incisively. "You did your whole duty in that bank matter; and it was a good deal more than most young women would have done. I'm not going to have you persecuted and harassed—not one minute! Where is this fellow stopping?"

The daughter shook her head. "I don't know. He gave me his card, but it has the New Orleans address only."

"Give it to me and I'll look him up to-morrow."

The card changed hands, and for a few minutes neither of them spoke. Then the daughter began again.

"I've had another shock this evening, too," she said, speaking this time in low tones and with eyes downcast. "This Mr. Griswold: tell me all you know about him, father."

"I don't know much of anything more than—

thanks to Miss Grierson—all the town knows. They brought him here sick—she and her father—as I told you. That was some little time before you came home; perhaps while you were still on the way up the river. They didn't know who he was; and oddly enough, there wasn't anything in his clothes or luggage to tell them. I know that to be a fact because, at Miss Margery's request, I helped her overhaul his belongings. Afterward, in a talk with him, I learned that he had been robbed on the train; or at least, that was the supposition. He said there was money in one of the suit-cases, and we didn't find any."

"He is an author, they say; I don't seem to recall his name in any of my reading."

The doctor laughed good-naturedly. "Perhaps he is only one of the would-be's; I don't think it has got much farther than the hankering, as yet. There was a book manuscript in one of his valises, and I read a little of it. It was pretty poor stuff, I thought. But what was your other shock?"

"It was at the dinner-table; when you were joking him about the come-down from Mereside to us. Something he said—I couldn't remember, a minute afterward, just what it was—was spoken exactly in the voice, and with the same little trick of conciseness, as something that was said to me that never-to-be-forgotten evening on the saloon-deck promenade of the *Belle Julie* . . . said by the man whose name was *not* John Wesley Gavitt."

"Oh, my dear girl!" was the father's instant protest; "that couldn't be, you know!"

"I know it couldn't," was the fair-minded rejoinder. "And I kept on telling myself so all the evening. I had to, father; for that once at the table wasn't the only time. Every few minutes he would say something to bring back that haunting half-recollection. It is only a coincidence, of course; it couldn't be anything else. But when he went away I couldn't help hoping that he would do one of two things; stay away altogether, or come often enough so that—oh, it's all nonsense, all of it: what difference can it make, to him or to me!"

"No difference at all." Doctor Bertie's membership was in that large confraternity of fathers whose blindness on the side of sentiment where their own daughters are concerned has become proverbial.

It was after he had taken up the latest copy of the *Lancet* and was beginning to bury himself in the editorials, that Charlotte reopened the threshed-out subject with a belated query.

"Did I understand you to say that he had lost all of his money?"

"Yes; practically all of it," said the father, without losing his hold upon what a certain great London physician was saying through the columns of the English medical journal.

But afterward, long after Charlotte had gone up to her room, he remembered, with a curious little start of half-awakened puzzlement, that some one, no longer ago than the yesterday, had told him that young Griswold was rich—or if not rich, at least "well-fixed."

XXVI

PITFALLS

WHAT arguments Edward Raymer used to convince his mother and sister that Griswold as a participating partner was better than Jasper Grierson figuring as the man in possession, the Wahaskan gossips were unable to guess. But the fact remained. Within a week from the day when Raymer, angrily jubilant, had rescued his imperilled stock, it was pretty generally known that Kenneth Griswold, the writing-man, had become the fourth member in the close corporation of the Raymer Foundry and Machine Works, and Wahaska was eagerly earning Broffin's contemptuous characterization of it by discussing the business affair in all its possible and probable bearings upon the Raymers, the Griersons, and the newly elected directory of the Pineboro Railroad.

Of all this buzzing of the gossip bees the person most acutely concerned heard little or nothing. Griswold's intimation to Raymer that he wished only to be a silent partner had been made in good faith; and beyond a few purely perfunctory visits to the plant across the railroad tracks, made because Raymer had insisted that he go over the books and learn for himself the exact condition of the business

into which he had put his money, Griswold took no more than an advisory part in the industrial activities. To Raymer's urgings there was always the same answer: the writing fit was on him and he had no time.

Taken for what it was worth, the writing excuse was sufficiently valid. In the fallow period of the slow convalescence the imaginative field had grown fertile for the plough, and a new book, borrowing nothing from the old save the sociological background, was already under way. Digging deeply in the inspirational field, Griswold speedily became oblivious to most of his encompassments; to all of them, indeed, save those which bore directly upon the beloved task. Among these, he counted the frequent afternoon visits to Mereside, and the scarcely less frequent evenings spent in the Farnham home. Again in harmony with the later prefigurings, he was using each of the young women as a foil for the other in the outworking of his plot; and he welcomed it as a sign of growth that the story in its new form was acquiring verisimilitude and becoming gratefully, and at times, he persuaded himself, quite vividly, human.

When he got well into the swing of it and was turning out a chapter every three or four days, he fell easily into the habit of slipping the last instalment into his pocket when he went to Mereside. Margery Grierson was adding generously to his immense obligation to her; hoping only to find a friendly listener, he found a helpful collaborator.

More than once, when his own imagination was at fault, she was able to open new vistas in the humanities for him, apparently drawing upon a reserve of intuitive conclusions compared with which his own hard-bought store of experimental knowledge was almost puerile.

"I wish you would tell me the secret of your marvellous cleverness!" he exclaimed, on one of the June afternoons when he had been reading to her in the cool half-shadows of the Mereside library. "You are only a child in years: how can you know with such miraculous certainty what other people would think and do under conditions about which you can't possibly know anything experimentally? It's beyond me!"

"There are many things beyond you yet, dear boy; many, many things," was her laughing rejoinder; from which it will be inferred that the episode in the Farmers' and Merchants' burglar-proof had become an episode forgotten—or at least forgiven. "You know men—a little; but when it comes to the women . . . well, if I didn't keep continually nagging at you, your two heroines—with neither of whom you are really in love—would degenerate into rag dolls. They would, actually."

"That's true; I can see it clearly enough when you point it out," he admitted, putting his craftsman pride underfoot, as he was always obliged to do in these talks with her. "I should be discouraged if you didn't keep on telling me that the story, as a story, is good."

"It *is* good; it is a big story," she asserted, with kindling enthusiasm. "The plot, so far as you have gone with it, is fine; and that is where you leave me away behind. I don't see how you could ever think it out. And the character-drawing is fine, too, some of it. Your *Fleming* is as far beyond me as your *Fidelia* seems to be beyond you."

"*Fleming* is human in every drop of his blood," he boasted.

"I don't doubt it for a moment; all the little earmarks of humanity are there, and I know in reason that he must be a type. But I have never met the man himself; and I am sure I shall be scared silly if I ever do meet him. Think of being shut up in any little corner of the world with a man who has convinced himself that he can commit any crime in the calendar so long as he believes the particular one he chooses isn't a crime!"

"Crime, so-called, is like everything else in this world; a thing to be defined strictly by the motive and the point of view," said Griswold, mounting his hobby with joyous alacrity.

"I know; that is what you say"—this with an adorable uptilt of the pretty chin and a flash of the dark eyes which an instant before had been slumbrous wells of studious abstraction. "But your *Fleming* is going to prove the contrary; it may not be what you want him to do, but it will be what he will insist upon doing before you get through with him. You have already indicated it in the story, unconsciously, perhaps. When *Fidelia* surprises him,

Fleming is almost ready to kill her; not in defense of the principle he has set up, but to save his own miserable life."

"That is a part of his humanity," insisted the craftsman stubbornly. "You don't know *Fleming* yet. Have you ever met *Fidelia?*"

"Not as you have drawn her—no. She is too unutterably fine. If she had a single shred of humanity about her, I should suspect you of meaning to fall in love with her, farther along—to the humiliation and despair of poor *Joan*, who, as you say, is a mere daughter of men."

"But how about *Joan?*" he fretted. "Is she out of drawing, too?"

"Yes; you are distorting her the other way—making her too inhumanly worldly and insincere." Then, with an abruptness that was like a slap in the face: "If you didn't spend so many evenings at Doctor Bertie's, you would get both *Fidelia* and *Joan* in better drawing."

He flushed and drew himself up, with the stabbed *amour propre* prompting him to make some stinging retort contrasting the wells of truth with the brackish waters of sheer worldliness. Then he saw how inadequate it would be; how utterly impossible it was to meet this charmingly vindictive young person upon any grounds save those of her own choosing.

"That is the first really unkind thing I have ever heard you say," was the mild reproach which was all that the reactionary second thought would sanction.

"Unkind to whom?—to you, or to Miss Farnham?"

"Ask yourself," he countered weakly; and she laughed at him.

"There is another of your failings, Kenneth. You haven't always the courage of your convictions. What you are thinking is that I am a spiteful little cat. Why don't you say it out loud, like a man?"

"Because I'm not thinking it," he denied, adding: "But I do think you are a little inclined to be unfair to Miss Charlotte."

"Am I? Let us see if I am. I accuse her of nothing but a slavish devotion to custom and the conventions. What did she say when you read her the chapter before this one: where *Fidelia* goes down to the dining-room at midnight and finds *Fleming* breaking into the silver-safe where the money is hidden?"

"I'm not reading the story to her," he admitted, and again she laughed.

"But you do talk it over with her; you couldn't help doing that," she persisted.

"Sometimes," he allowed.

"Well, what did she say when you came to that part where *Fidelia* makes *Fleming* sit down while she tries to convince him that house-breaking is a crime. You don't dare tell me what she said."

Griswold did it, with a firm convincement that he was thereby breaking a sacred confidence. But the alluring lips and eyes were irresistible when he was fairly within their influence.

"I merely suggested the scene as something that might be done," he explained. "She did not approve of it. Her objection was that the *Fidelias* in real life don't do such things."

"They don't," was Miss Margery's flippant agreement. "And your letting your *Fidelia* do it is the one redeeming thing you have done in your drawing of her. Just the same, with all your ingenuity you leave one with the firm conviction that she will never, under any circumstances, do such an unconventional thing again; never, never, never! And that is a false note."

"Why is it?"

"Because it leaves out the common sex-factor; the one that is shared alike by the *Fidelias* and the *Joans* and all the rest of us."

"And that is——"

"Just plain, every-day inconsistency—our dearest heritage from good old Mother Eve. Being a mere man, you can't understand that, so you neglect to put it into your women."

"But I can't let that stand," he objected. "You must allow the ideal some little latitude. *Fidelia* was not inconsistent, either in striving with *Fleming*, or in betraying him."

Miss Grierson's perfect shoulders twitched in a little shrug of impatience.

"Not that time, maybe; with *Fleming* standing by to tell her that she must be true to herself at whatever cost to him. But the next time—if she should happen to fall in love with the gentleman

who was breaking into her father's house-safe. . . ." She laughed in sheer mockery and misquoted a couplet from Riley for him:

> "'There, little boy, don't cry;
> I have broken your doll, I know!'"

"Break some more of them if you can," he urged. "A few more casualties won't make any difference."

"There is only the boy-doll left; and I don't like to break boy-dolls."

"*Fleming*, you mean? I give you leave. Hammer him until he bleeds sawdust, if the spirit moves you."

Miss Grierson had been curled up like a comfortable kitten in the depths of a great lounging chair—her favorite attitude while he was reading to her. But now she sat up and locked her fingers over one knee.

"I said a little while ago that I'd never met *Fleming*, and I haven't. But I like him, and I'm sorry to see him putting himself in for such a savage hereafter. He is a good man, like other good men, with the single difference that he thinks he isn't bound by the traditions. He believes he can commit what the traditionary people call a crime without paying the penalties. He can't: nobody can."

Griswold's smile was the superior smile of the writing craftsman. "That is merely a matter of invention," he asserted. "He can escape the penalties if he is smart enough."

"You mistake me," she interposed. "I don't mean the physical penalties; though as to these the old saying that murder will out must have some foundation in fact. Let that go: we'll suppose him clever enough to make his escape and to outwit or outfight his enemies. I don't say he couldn't do it successfully; but I do say that, with the hazards confronting him at every turn, he will find the real criminal in him growing and possessing him, making him think things and do things of the utter depravity of which he has never had any doubt."

While she was speaking Griswold could feel the change she was describing stealing over him like a nightmare, and when she stopped he passed his hand over his eyes as one awaking from a vaguely terrifying dream.

"You mean that there is a real criminal in every man?" he questioned, and the question seemed to say itself of its own volition.

"In every man and in every woman: how can you be a writer and not know that? Ask yourself. You admit the existence of the good and the bad, and ordinarily you choose the good and shudder at the bad: tell me—haven't there been times when the most horrible crimes were possible to you?—times when, with the littlest tipping of the balance, you could have killed somebody? You needn't answer: I know you have looked over that brink, because I have looked over it myself, more than once. And, sooner or later, *Fleming* will find himself looking over it—with all the horrors of the penalties push-

ing and shoving at him to tumble him into the gulf."

Griswold did not reply. He was gathering up the scattered pages of his manuscript and replacing them in order. When he spoke again it was of a matter entirely irrelevant.

"I had an odd experience the other evening," he said. "I had been dining with the Raymers and was walking back to Shawnee Street. A little newsboy named Johnnie Fergus turned up from somewhere at one of the street crossings and tried to sell me a paper—at eleven o'clock at night! I bought one and joked him about being out so late; and from that on I couldn't get rid of him. He went all the way home with me, talking a blue streak and acting as if he were afraid of something or somebody. I remembered afterward that he is the boy who takes care of your boat. Is there anything wrong with him?"

Miss Grierson had left her chair and had gone to stand at one of the windows.

"Nothing that I know of," she said. "He is a bright boy—too bright for his own good, I'm afraid. But I can explain—a little. Johnnie has taken a violent fancy to you for some reason, and he has fallen into the boyish habit of weaving all sorts of romances around you. I think he reads too many exciting stories and tries to make you the hero of them. He told me the other day that he was sure somebody was 'spotting' you."

Griswold looked up quickly. Miss Grierson was

still facing the window, and he was glad that she had not seen his nervous start.

"'Spotting' me?" he laughed. "Where did he get that idea?"

"How should I know? But he had made himself believe it; he even went so far as to describe the man. Oh, I can assure you Johnnie has an imagination; I've tested it in other ways."

"I should think so!" said the man who also had an imagination, and shortly afterward he took his leave.

An hour later the same afternoon, Broffin, from his post of observation on the Winnebago porch, saw the writing-man cross the street and enter a hardware shop. Having nothing better to do, he, too, crossed the street and, in passing, looked into the open door of Simmons & Kleifurt's. What he saw brought him back at the end of a reflective stroll around the public square. When he entered the shop the clerk was putting a formidable array of weapons back into their show-case niches. Broffin lounged up and began to handle the pistols.

"If I knew enough about guns to be able to tell 'em apart, I might buy one," he said half-humorously. And then: "You must 've been having a mighty particular customer—to get so many of 'em out."

"It was Mr. Griswold, Mr. Ed. Raymer's new partner," said the clerk. "And he *was* pretty particular; wouldn't have anything but these new-fashioned automatics. Said he wanted something

that would be quick and sure, and I guess he's got it—I sold him two of 'em."

Broffin played with the stock long enough to convince the clerk that he was only a counter lounger with no intention of buying. "Took two of 'em, did he?—for fear one might make him sick, I reckon," he said, with the half-humorous grin still lurking under the drooping mustaches. "Automatic thirty-twos, eh? Well, *I* ain't goin' to try to hold your Mr.—Griscom, did you call him?—up none after this. He might git me."

Whereupon, having found out what he wanted to know, he lounged out again and went back to the hotel to smoke another of the reflective cigars in the porch chair which had come to be his by right of frequent and long-continued occupancy.

XXVII

IN THE SHADOWS

Not counting the vague and rather pointless disturbment which had culminated in the purchase of a pair of pistols, Griswold had left the Mereside library considerably shaken, not in his convictions, to be sure, but in his confidence in his own powers of imaginative analysis. For this cause it required a longer after-dinner stay at the Farnhams' than he had been allowing himself, to re-establish the norm of self-assurance.

This was coming to be the net result of a better acquaintance with Charlotte Farnham; a growth in the grace of self-containment, and in a just appreciation of the mighty power that lies in propinquity—the propinquity of an inspiring ideal. Miss Farnham was never enthusiastic; that, perhaps, would be asking too much of an ideal; but what she lacked in warmth was made up in cool sanity, backed by a moral sense that seemed never to waver. Unerringly she placed her finger upon the human weaknesses in his book-people, and unfalteringly she bade him reform them.

For his *Fidelia*, as he described her, she exhibited a gentle affection, tempered by a compassionate pity

for her weaknesses and waverings; an attitude, he fatuously told himself, forced upon her because her own standards were so much higher than any he could delineate or conceive. For *Joan* there was also compassion, but it was mildly contemptuous.

"If I did not know that you are incapable of doing such a thing, I might wonder if you are not drawing your *Joan* from the life, Mr. Griswold," she said, a little coldly, on this same evening of rehabilitations. "Since such characters are to be found in real life, I suppose they may have a place in a book. But you must not commit the unpardonable sin of making your readers condone the evil in her for the sake of the good."

"May we not sometimes condone a little evil for the sake of a great good?" he pleaded in extenuation.

Her answer was rather disconcerting.

"Life is full of just such temptations; the temptation to bargain with expediency. We can only pray blindly to be delivered in the hour of trial."

They were sitting together on the vine-sheltered porch, and the street electrics with the lamplight from the sitting-room windows served merely to temper the velvety gloom of the summer night. He would have given much to be able to see her face, but the darkness came between.

"That opens the door to the larger question which is always asking for its answer," he said, letting the thought that was uppermost slip into speech. "At its very best, life is a compromise, not necessarily

between good and evil, but between the thing possible and the thing impossible. It is not until we are strong enough to break the shacklings of the traditions that we are free to drive the best obtainable bargain with destiny."

As at other times, he was once more yielding to the impulse which was always prompting him to apply the acid test to the pure gold of the ideal. Heretofore the test had revealed no trace of earthly alloy; but now the result filled him with vague dismay.

"So you have said many times before," she rejoined, and her voice was as the voice of one groping in the dark. "I—I have a confession to make, Mr. Griswold: I have held out against you, knowing all the time that you were right; that life *is* full of these bitter compromises which we are forced to accept. Please forget what I have said about your *Fidelia* and—and your *Joan*. You are trying to make them human, and that is as it should be."

Griswold could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. He told himself fiercely that he would never believe, without the convincement of fact, that the ideal could step down from its pedestal.

"You are meaning to be kind to me now, at the expense of your convictions, Miss Charlotte," he protested warmly.

"No," she denied gravely. "Listen, and you shall judge. Once, only a short time ago, I was brought face to face with one of these terrible compromises. In a single instant, and by no fault of

my own, the dreadful shears of fate were thrust into my hands, and conscience—what I have been taught to call the Christian conscience—told me that with them I must snip the thread of a man's life. Are you listening?"

His lips were dry and he had to moisten them before he could say: "Yes, go on; I am listening."

"The man was a criminal and he was a fugitive from justice. Conscience—*my* conscience—insisted that it was my plain duty to raise the hue and cry. For a long time I couldn't do it; and then——"

He waited until the silence had grown unbearable before he prompted her. "And then?"

"And then chance threw us together. A new world was opened to me in those few moments. I had thought that there could be no possible question between simple right and wrong, but almost in his first word the man convinced me that, whatever I might think or the world might say, *his* conscience had fully and freely acquitted him. And he proved it; proved it so that I can never doubt it as long as I live. He made me do what *my* conscience had been telling me I ought to do—just as your *Fleming* makes *Fidelia* do."

"You denounced him?" he said, and he strove desperately to make the saying completely colorless.

"Yes."

"And he was taken?"

"He was; but he made his escape again, almost at once. He is still a free man."

Instantly the primitive instinct of self-preservation, the instinct of the hunted fugitive, sprang alert in the listener.

"How can you be sure of that?" he asked, and in his own ears his voice sounded like the clang of an alarm bell.

Again a silence fell, surcharged, this one, with all the old frightful possibilities. Once more the loathsome fever quickened the pulses of the man at bay, and the curious needle-like prickling of the skin came to signal the return of the homicidal fear-frenzy. The reaction to the normal racked him like the passing of a mortal sickness when his accusing angel said in her most matter-of-fact tone:

"I know he is free; I have it on the best possible authority. The detectives who are searching for him have been here to see me—or, at least, one of them has."

The hunted one laid hold of the partial reprieve with a mighty grip and drew himself out of the reactionary whirlpool.

"To see you? Why should they trouble you?"

"On general man-hunting principles, I suppose," was the calm reply. "Since I gave the necessary information once, they seem to think I can give it again. It is very annoying."

"It is an outrage!" declared the listener warmly. And afterward, with only the proper friendly emphasis: "I hope it is an annoyance past."

His companion leaned forward in her chair and cautiously parted the leafy vine screen.

"Look across the street—under those trees at the water's edge: do you see him?"

Griswold looked and was reasonably sure that he could make out the shadowy figure of a man leaning against one of the trees.

"That is my shadow," she said, lowering her voice; "Mr. Matthew Broffin, of the Colburne Detective Agency, in New Orleans. He has a foolish idea that I am in communication with the man he is searching for, and he was brutal enough to tell me so. What he expects to accomplish by keeping an absurd watch upon our house and dogging everybody who comes and goes, I can't imagine."

"You have told your father?" said Griswold, anxious to learn how far this new alarm fire had spread.

"Certainly; and he has made his protest. But it doesn't do any good; the man keeps on spying, as you see. But we have wandered a long way from your book. I've been trying to prove to you that I am not fit to criticise it."

"No; you mustn't mistake me. I haven't been coming to you for criticism," was Griswold's rather incoherent reply; and when the talk threatened to lapse into the commonplaces, he took his leave. Oddly enough, as he thought, when he was unlatching the gate and had shifted one of the newly purchased automatic pistols from his hip pocket to an outside pocket of the light top-coat he was wearing, the shadowy figure under the lake-shading trees had disappeared.

It was only a few minutes after the lingering dinner guest had gone when the doctor came out on the porch, bringing his long-stemmed pipe for a bed-time whiff in the open air.

"You are losing your beauty sleep, little girl," he said, dropping into the chair lately occupied by the guest. "Did you find out anything more to-night?"

The daughter did not reply at once, and when she did there was a note of freshly summoned hardihood in her voice.

"We were both mistaken," she affirmed. "Coincidences are always likely to be misleading. I am sorry I told you about them. He has certainly been a present help in time of need to Edward."

"How did you reach your conclusion?" inquired the pipe smoker, upon whom the coincidences were still actively exerting their influence.

"It came out in the talk this evening. He has been rather ridiculously putting me upon a pedestal, trying to make me fit an ideal character in his book, I think. To prove to him that I am only human, I told him the story of what happened on the *Belle Julie*. And, to cap the climax, I pointed out our friend Mr. Broffin, who was on guard again—as usual—and told him who the house watcher was and what he wanted. It didn't affect him any more than it would any friend of the family. He was interested in the story as a story, and—and in its bearing upon me as a—as a life-experience. But that was all."

"You may be right; you probably are right," was

the father's comment after a thoughtful whiff or two had intervened. "Just the same, I've looked up the dates in my case book: if your Gavitt man, escaping from the officers in St. Louis, had taken the first train for Wahaska, he would have reached here at precisely the same moment that the sick Mr. Griswold did. Also, he would have been careful to remove all the little tags and telltales from his brand-new clothes—which was what Mr. Griswold very evidently had done. Also, again, the amount of money which Mr. Griswold has put into the Raymer capital stock tallies to within ten thousand dollars of the amount your Gavitt fellow walked away with in New Orleans. Also, number three, Mr. Griswold acted very much like a man who had lost all he had in the world when I told him that Miss Grierson and I had found no money in his suit-cases; and——"

"That is the weak link in your chain, isn't it?" objected the daughter. "You remember he told me on the boat that he had lost the money?"

Again the father took counsel of the long-stemmed pipe.

"It might be," he said, after a reflective pause. "It would be, if Miss Grierson could be safely eliminated from the equation. Unhappily, she can't be."

"I don't care!" came from the depths of the porch rocking-chair. "If this miserable detective arrests him and appeals to me, I shall simply refuse to know anything about it! I wish you'd tell this man Broffin so when you meet him again."

As before, the good little doctor had recourse to his pipe, and it was not until his daughter got up to go in that he said gently: "One other word, Charlie, girl: are you altogether sure that the wish isn't father to the thought—about Griswold?"

"Don't be absurd, papa!" she said scornfully, passing swiftly behind his chair to reach the door; and with that answer he was obliged to be content.

XXVIII

BROKEN LINKS

It was on the second day after the pistol-buying incident in Simmons & Kleifurt's that Broffin, wishful for solitude and a chance to think in perspective, took to the woods.

In the moment of lost temper, when he had threatened angrily to play an indefinite waiting game, prolonging it until his man should walk into the trap, nothing had really been farther from his intentions. As a matter of fact, there were the best of business reasons why he should not waste another day in following, or attempting to follow, the cold trail. Other cases were pressing, and his daily mail from the New Orleans head-quarters brought urgings impatient and importunate; and on the third day following the sleeveless interview with the doctor's daughter he had paid his bill at the Winnebago House and had packed his grip for the southward flight by the afternoon train.

Twenty minutes before train-time a telegram from the New Orleans office had reopened the closed and crossed-off account of the Bayou State Security robbery. It was a bare line in answer to his own wire advising the office that he was about to return,

but its significance was out of all proportion to its length. "B. S. S. man is in your town. Important letter to-day's mail," was all it said, but that was sufficient. Broffin had promptly told the clerk of the Winnebago that he had changed his mind, and forty-eight hours afterward he had the letter.

Like the telegram, the mail communication was significant but inconclusive. One Patrick Sheehan, a St. Louis cab driver, dying, had made confession to his priest. For a bribe of two hundred dollars he had aided and abetted the escape of a criminal on a day and date corresponding to the mid-April arrival of the steamer *Belle Julie* at St. Louis. Afterward he had driven the man to an up-town hotel (name not given) and had obtained from the clerk the man's name and destination. In his letter enclosing the confession the priest went on to say that the penitent had evidently had a severe struggle with his conscience. A mistaken sense of gratitude to the man who had bribed him had led him to tear off and destroy the upper half of the card given him by the up-town hotel clerk, and with the reminder gone he could not recall the man's name. But the destination address, "Wahaska, Minnesota," had been preserved, and the torn portion of the card bearing it was submitted with the confession.

With this new clue for an incentive, Broffin had immediately put his nose to the cold trail again. All other things apart, the torn card conclusively proved the correctness of the obstinately maintained hypothesis. If the robber had really chosen Wahaska for

his hiding-place, he had done so merely because it was Miss Farnham's home. The boldness of the thing appealed instantly to a like quality in the detective, and he was not entirely unprepared for the eye-opening shock which came when he began to suspect that Griswold, the writing-man, was the man he was looking for.

The premonitory symptoms of the shock had manifested themselves when he began to note the regularity of Griswold's visits to the house in Lake Boulevard. Then came the pistol-buying episode, closely following an investment of money possible only to a capitalist—or a robber. Broffin worked quickly after this, tracing Griswold's record back to its Wahaskan beginnings and shadowing his man so faithfully that at any hour of the day or night he could have clapped the arresting hand upon his shoulder. Still he hesitated. Once, in his Secret Service days, he had arrested the wrong man, and the smart of the prosecution for false imprisonment would rankle as long as he lived.

This was why he took to the woods on the afternoon of the second day following Griswold's pistol purchase. He felt himself growing short-sighted from the very nearness of things. The single necessity now was for absolute and unshakable identification. To establish this, three witnesses, and three only, could be called upon. Of the three, two had failed signally—Miss Farnham because she had her own reasons for blocking the game, and President Galbraith . . . That was another chapter in the book of

failure. Broffin had learned that the president was stopping at the De Soto Inn, and he had manœuvred to bring Mr. Galbraith face to face with Griswold in the Grierson bank on the day after the pistol-buying. To his astonishment and disgust the president had shaken his head irritably, adding a rebuke. "Na, na, man; your trade makes ye over-suspeecious. That's Mr. Griswold, the writer-man and a friend of the Griersons. Miss Madgie was telling me about him last week. He's no more like the robber than you are. Haven't I told ye the man was bearded like a tyke?"

With two of the three eye-witnesses refusing to testify, there remained only Johnson, the paying teller of the Bayou State Security. Broffin was considering the advisability of wiring for Johnson when he passed the last of the houses on the lakeside drive and struck into the country road which led by cool and shaded forest windings to the resort hotel at the head of the southern bay. If Johnson should fail—and in view of the fact that President Galbraith had failed it was a possibility to be reckoned with—there remained only two doubtful expedients. With Patrick Sheehan's confession to point the way it might be possible to trace the transformed deck-hand from his final interview with McGrath on the *Belle Julie* step by step to his appearance, sick and delirious, in Wahaska twenty-four hours later. This was one of the expedients. The other was to take the long chance by clapping the handcuffs upon Griswold in some moment of unpreparedness. It

was a well-worn trick, and it did not always succeed in surprising the admission of guilt necessary to make it hold good. And if it should not hold good, there might be consequences. As we have noted, Broffin had once clapped the handcuffs on the wrong man.

Chewing an extinct cigar and ruminating thoughtfully over his problem, Broffin had followed the windings of the country road well into the lake-enclosing forest when he heard the rattle of wheels and the hoof-beats of a horse. Presently the vehicle overtook and passed him. It was Miss Grierson's trap, drawn by the big English trap-horse, with Miss Grierson herself holding the reins and Raymer lounging comfortably in the spare seat.

The sight of the pair moved Broffin to speech apostrophic—when the two were out of earshot. "You're the little lady I'd like to back into a corner," he muttered. "What you know about this business—and wouldn't tell, not if you was gettin' the third degree for it—would tie up all the broken strings in a hurry. How do I know you didn't help him to get out of St. Louis? How do I know that the whole blame sick play wasn't a plant from start to finish?" He stopped and struck viciously at a roadside weed with the switch he had cut. It was a new idea, an idea with promise; and when he went on, the reflective excursion had become a journey with a purpose. Chance had been good to him now and then in his hard-working career: perhaps it would be good to him again. Having let one woman put a stumbling-block in his way, perhaps it was going

to even things up by making another woman remove it.

Half an hour later Broffin had followed the huge hoof-prints of the great English trap-horse to the driveway portal of the De Soto grounds where they were lost on the pebbled carriage approach. Strolling on through the grounds into the lake-fronting lobby of the Inn, he was soon able to account for Raymer. The young iron-founder was evidently on business bent. He was sitting in the lobby with a man whom Broffin recognized as the master car builder of the Pineboro Railroad, and the two were discussing mechanical details over a thick file of blue-prints spread out on Raymer's knees. The smile under Broffin's drooping mustaches was a grin of instant comprehension. Miss Grierson, driving Raymer's way, had picked up the iron-founder and brought him along to the business appointment. It was a way she had—when the candidate for the spare seat in the trap happened to be young and good-looking.

Having placed Raymer, Broffin went in search of Miss Grierson. He found her on the broad veranda, alone, and for the moment unoccupied. How to make the attack so direct and so overwhelming that it could not be withstood was the only remaining question; and Broffin had answered it to his own satisfaction, and was advancing through an open French window directly behind Miss Grierson's chair to put the answer into effect, when the opportunity was snatched away. Raymer, with his roll

of blue-prints under his arm and his business with the master car builder apparently concluded, came down the veranda and took the chair next to Miss Grierson's.

Broffin dropped back into the writing-room alcove for which the open French window was the outlet and sat down to bide his time, taking care that the chair which he noiselessly placed for himself should be out of sight from the veranda, but not out of earshot. It seemed very unlikely that the two young people who were enjoying the Minnedaskan view would say anything worth listening to; but the ex-harrier of moonshine-makers was of those who discount all chances.

For a time nothing happened. The two on the veranda talked of the view, of the coming regatta, of the latest lawn social given by the Guild of St. John's. Broffin surmised that they were waiting for the trap to be brought around from the hotel stables, though why there should be a delay was not so evident. But in any event his opportunity was lost unless he could contrive to isolate the young woman again. It was while he was groping for the compassing means that Raymer said:

"It's a shame to make you wait this way, Miss Madge. McMurtry said he had an appointment with Mr. Galbraith for three o'clock, and he had to go and keep it. But he ought to be down again by this time. Don't wait for me if you want to go back to town. I can get a lift from somebody."

"That would be nice, wouldn't it?" was the

good-natured retort. "To make you tie up your own horse in town and then to leave you stranded away out here three miles from nowhere! I think I see myself doing such a thing! Besides, I haven't a thing to do but to wait."

Broffin shifted the extinct cigar he was chewing from one corner of his mouth to the other and pulled his soft hat lower over his eyes. He, too, could wait. There was a little stir on the veranda; a rustling of silk petticoats and the click of small heels on the hardwood floor. Broffin could not forbear the peering peep around the sheltering window draperies. Miss Grierson had left her seat and was pacing a slow march up and down before Raymer's chair, apparently for Raymer's benefit. The watcher behind the window draperies drew back quickly when she made the turn to face his way, arguing sapiently that whatever significance their further talk might hold would be carefully and thoughtfully neutralized if Miss Grierson should see him. That she had not seen him became a fact sufficiently well-assured when she sat down again and began to speak of Griswold.

"How is the new partnership going, by this time," she asked, after the manner of one who re-winnows the chaff of the commonplaces in the hope of finding grain enough for the immediate need.

"So far as Griswold is concerned, you wouldn't notice that there is a partnership," laughed the iron-founder. "I can't make him galvanize an atom of interest in his investment. All I can get out of him is, 'Don't bother me; I'm busy.'"

"Mr. Griswold is in a class by himself, don't you think?" was the questioning comment.

"He is all kinds of a good fellow; that's all I know, and all I ask to know," answered Raymer loyally.

"I believe that—now," said his companion, with the faintest possible emphasis upon the time-word.

Broffin marked the emphasis, and the pause that preceded it, and leaned forward to miss no word.

"Meaning that there was a time when you didn't believe it?" Raymer asked.

"Meaning that there was a time when he had me scared half to death," confessed the one who seemed always to say the confidential thing as if it were the most trivial. "Do you remember one day in the library, when you found me looking over the files of the newspapers for the story of the robbery of the Bayou State Security Bank in New Orleans?"

Raymer remembered it very well, and admitted it.

"That was the time when the dreadful idea was scaring me stiff," she went on. "You remember the story, don't you? how the president—our Mr. Galbraith here—was held up at the point of a pistol and marched to the paying teller's window, and how the robber escaped on a river steamboat and was recognized by somebody and was arrested at St. Louis?"

"Yes; I remember it all very clearly. Also I recollect how the second newspaper notice told how he escaped from the officers at St. Louis. Wasn't there something about a young woman being mixed up in it some way?"

"There was: *she* was the one who recognized the robber disguised as a deck-hand on the boat."

Raymer seemed to have forgotten his impatience for a renewal of the interview with the Pineboro Railroad master car builder.

"I don't seem to recall any mention of that in the newspapers," he said half-doubtfully.

"The newspaper reporters didn't put two and two together, but I did," asserted the sharer of confidences. "There was a young woman getting a draft cashed at the teller's window when the robbery was committed. The bank people didn't know her, so she must have been travelling. You see it's simple enough when you put your mind to it."

"But you haven't told me how you were scared," Raymer suggested.

"I'm coming to that. This escape we read about happened on a certain day in April. It was the very day on which poppa met me on my way back from Florida, and we took the eleven-thirty train north that night. You haven't forgotten that Mr. Griswold was a passenger on that same train?"

"But, goodness gracious, Miss Margery! any number of people were passengers on that train. You surely wouldn't——"

"Hush!" she said, and through the lace window hangings Broffin saw her lift a warning finger. "What I am telling you, Mr. Raymer, is in the strictest confidence; we mustn't let a breath of it get out. But that wasn't all. Mr. Griswold was dreadfully sick, and, of course, he couldn't tell us

anything about himself. But while he was delirious he was always muttering something about money, money; money that he had lost and couldn't find, or money that he had found and couldn't lose. Then when we thought he couldn't possibly get well, Doctor Bertie and I ransacked his suit-cases for cards or letters or something that would tell us who he was and where he came from. *There wasn't the littlest thing!*"

"And that was when you began to suspect?" queried Raymer.

"That was when the suspicion began to torture me. I fought it; oh, you don't know how hard I fought it! There he was, lying sick and helpless; utterly unable to do a thing or say a word in his own defence; and yet, if he were the robber, of course, we should have to give him up. It was terrible!"

"I should say so," was Raymer's sympathetic comment. "How did you get it straightened out, at last?"

"It hasn't been altogether straightened out until just lately—within the past few days," she went on gravely. "After he began to get well, I made him talk to me—about himself, you know. There didn't seem to be anything to conceal. At different times he told me all about his home, and his mother, whom he barely remembers, and the big-hearted, open-handed father who made money so easily in his profession—he was *the* Griswold, the great architect, you know—that he gave it away to anybody who wanted it—but I suppose he has told you all this?"

"No; at least, not very much of it."

Miss Grierson went on smoothly, falling sympathetically into the reminiscent vein.

"Kenneth went to college without ever having known what it was to lack anything in reason that money could buy. A little while after he was graduated his father died."

"Leaving Kenneth poor, I suppose; he has intimated as much to me, once or twice," said Raymer.

"Leaving him awfully poor. He wanted to learn to write, and for a long time he stayed on in New York, living just any old way, and having a dreadfully hard time of it, I imagine, though he would never say much about that part of it. He says he was studying the under-dog, and he has told me some of the most harrowing things he has seen and been through: one of them had a little child in it—a baby that he found in a tenement where the father and mother had both died of starvation . . . think of it! And he took the baby away and fed it and kept it. . . ."

Broffin, sitting behind the window draperies, had his elbows on his knees and his head tightly clamped between his hands. He was striving, as the dying strive for breath, to remember. Where had he heard this self-same story of the man who had fought some sort of a studying fight in the back-water of the New York slums? In every detail it came back to him like the recurring scenes of a vivid dream; but the key-notes of time, place, and the man's

identity were gone; lost beyond any power of the groping mentality to recall them.

"That is why he thinks he is a Socialist," Miss Grierson was going on evenly. "I've been wondering if you knew these things, and I've wanted to tell you. I've thought it might help you to understand him better if you knew something of what he has been through. But we were talking about my dreadful suspicion. It persisted, you know, right along through everything. At last, I felt that I just *must* know, at whatever cost. One day when we were driving, I brought him here and—and introduced him to Mr. Galbraith. I was so scared that I could taste it—but I did it!"

Raymer laughed. "Of course, nothing came of it?"

"Nothing at all; and the reaction pretty nearly made me faint. They just made talk, like any two freshly introduced people would, and that was all there was of it. You'd say that was proof enough, wouldn't you? Surely Mr. Galbraith would recognize the man who robbed him?"

"Certainly; there couldn't be any doubt of that."

"That's what I said. And then, right out of a clear sky, came another proof that was even more convincing. Do you happen to know who the young woman was who discovered the bank robber on the steamboat?"

"I? How should I know?"

"I didn't know but she had told you," was the demure rejoinder. "It was Charlotte Farnham."

"What!" ejaculated Raymer. But he was not more deeply moved than was the man behind the window curtains. If Broffin's dead cigar had not been already reduced to shapeless inutility, Miss Grierson's cool announcement, carrying with it the assurance that his secret was no secret, would have settled it.

"It's so," she was adding calmly. "I found out. She and her aunt were passengers on the *Belle Julie;* that was the boat the robber escaped on, you remember. Doctor Bertie told me that. And she was the young woman who was having the draft cashed in the Bayou State Security. How do I know? Because her father bought the draft at poppa's bank, and in the course of time it came back with the Bayou State Security's dated paying stamp on it. See how easy it was!"

Raymer's laugh was not altogether mirthful.

"You are a witch," he said. "Is there anything that you don't know?"

"Not so very many things that I really need to know," was the mildly boastful retort. "But you see, now, how foolish my suspicions were. Mr. Galbraith meets Mr. Griswold just as he would any other nice young man; and Charlotte Farnham, who recognized the robber even when he was disguised as a deck-hand, sees Mr. Griswold pretty nearly every day."

Raymer nodded. Though he would not have admitted it under torture, the entire matter figured somewhat as a mountain constructed out of a rather small

mole-hill to a man for whom the subtleties lay in a region unexplored. He wondered that the clear-minded little "social climber," as his sister called her, had ever bothered her nimble brain about such an abstruse and far-fetched question of identities.

"You said, a few minutes ago, that Griswold calls himself a Socialist. That isn't quite the word. He is a sociologist."

Miss Grierson ignored the nice distinction in names.

"Socialism goes with being poor, doesn't it?" she remarked. "Since Mr. Griswold's ship has come in, I suppose he finds it easier, and pleasanter, to be a theoretical leveller than a practical one."

"That is another thing I have never been quite able to understand," said the iron-founder. "You say his father left him poor: where did he get his money?"

"Why, don't you know?" was the innocent query. And then, with a pretty affectation of embarrassment, real or perfectly simulated: "If he hasn't told you, I mustn't."

"Of course, I don't want to pry," said Raymer, loyal again.

"I can give you a hint, and that is all. Don't you remember 'My Lady Jezebel,' the unsigned novel that made such a hit last summer?"

"Why, bless goodness, yes! Did he write that?"

"He has never admitted it in so many words. But I'll divide a little secret with you. He has been reading bits of his new book to me, and pshaw! a

blind person could tell! I asked him once if he could guess how much the author of 'My Lady Jezebel' had been paid, and he said, with the most perfectly transparent carelessness: 'Oh, about a hundred thousand, I suppose.'"

"Tally!" said Raymer, laughing. "Griswold has put an even ninety thousand into my little egg-basket out at the plant. But, of course you knew that, everybody in Wahaska knows it by this time."

"Yes; I knew it."

"I'm glad it's book money," Raymer went on. "If we should happen to go smash, he won't feel the loss quite so fiercely. I have a friend over in Wisconsin; he is a laboratory professor in mechanics, and he writes books on the side. He says a book is a pure gamble. If you win, you have that much more money to throw to the dicky-birds. If you lose, you've merely drawn the usual blank."

Miss Grierson did not reply, and for a little while they were both silent. Then Raymer said:

"I wonder if McMurtry doesn't think I've dropped out on him. I guess I'd better go and see. Don't wait any longer on my motions, unless you want to, Miss Margery."

When Raymer had gone, the opportunity which Broffin had so lately craved was his. Miss Grierson was left alone on the big veranda, and he had only to step out and confront her. Instead, he got up quietly and went back through the lobby with his head down and his hands in his pockets, and the surviving bit of the dead cigar disappeared between

his strong teeth and became a cud of chagrin. There had been a goal in sight, but Miss Grierson had beat him to it.

And the winner of the small handicap? For the time it took Raymer to disappear she sat perfectly still, in the attitude of one who stifles all the other senses that the listening ear may hear and strike the note of warning or of relief. A group of young people, returning from a steam-launch circuit of the upper lake, came up the steps to disperse itself with pleasant human clatterings on the veranda; but in spite of the distractions the listening ear caught the sound for which it was straining. With a deep breath-drawing that was almost a sob, Miss Grierson sprang up, stole a swift confirming glance at the empty chair behind the window hangings, and crossed the veranda to stand with one arm around a supporting pillar. And since the battle was fought and won, and the friendly pillar gave its stay and shelter, the velvety eyes filled suddenly and the ripe red lips were trembling like the lips of a frightened child.

XXIX

ALL THAT A MAN HATH

For four entire days after Margery Grierson had driven home the nail of the elemental verities in her frank criticism of the new book, and Charlotte Farnham had clinched it, Wahaska's public places saw nothing of Griswold; and Mrs. Holcomb, motherly soul, was driven to expostulate scoldingly with her second-floor front who was pushing the pen feverishly from dawn to the small hours, and evidently—in the kindly widow's phrase—burning the candle at both ends and in the middle.

Out of this candle-burning frenzy the toiler emerged in the afternoon of the fifth day, a little pallid and tremulous from the overstrain, but with a thick packet of fresh manuscript to bulge in his pocket when he made his way, blinking at the unwonted sunlight of out-of-doors, to the great house at the lake's edge.

Margery was waiting for him when he rang the bell: he guessed it gratefully, and she confirmed it.

"Of course," she said, with the bewitching little grimace which could be made to mean so much or so little. "Isn't this your afternoon? Why shouldn't I be waiting for you?" Then, with a swiftly sym-

pathetic glance for the pale face and the tired eyes: "You've been overworking again. Let's sit out here on the porch where we can have what little air there is. There must be a storm brewing; it's positively breathless in the house."

Griswold was glad enough to acquiesce; glad and restfully happy and mildly intoxicated with her beauty and the loving rudeness with which she pushed him into the easiest of the great lounging chairs and took the sheaf of manuscript away from him, declaring that she meant to read it herself.

"It will wear you out," he objected, fishing for the denial which would give the precious fillip to the craftsman vanity.

The denial came promptly.

"Foolish!" she said; "as if anything you have written could make anybody tired!" And then, with the mocking after-touch he had come to know so well, and to look for: "Is that what you wanted me to say?"

"You are the spice of life and your name should have been Variety," he countered feebly. "But I warn you beforehand: there is a frightful lot of it. I have rewritten it from the beginning."

"So much the better," she affirmed. "You've been doling it out to me in little morsels, and I've been aching to get it all at one bite." And she began to read.

It was the first time he had had any of his own work read to him, and the experience was a pure

luxury; at once the keenest and the most sensuous enjoyment he had ever known. Marvelling, as he was always moved to marvel, at her bright mind and clever wit and clear insight, he was driven to the superlatives again to find words to describe her reading. Artistically, and as with the gifted sympathy of a born actress, she seemed able to breathe the very atmosphere of the story. None of his subtle nuances were lost; there was never an emphasis misplaced. Better still, the impersonation was perfect. By turns she became himself, *Joan*, *Fidelia*, *Fleming*, or one of the subsidiary characters, speaking the parts, rather than reading them, with such a sure apprehension of his meaning that he could almost fancy that she was reading from his mind instead of following the manuscript.

When it was over; and he could not tell whether the interval should be measured by minutes or hours; the return to the realities—the hot afternoon, the tree-shaded veranda, the lake dimpling like a sheet of molten metal under the sun-glare—was almost painful.

"It is wonderful—simply wonderful!" he said, drawing a deep breath; and then, with a flush of honest confusion to drive away the work pallor: "Of course, you know I don't mean the story; I meant your reading of it. Hasn't any one ever told you that you have the making of a great actress in you, Margery, girl?"

"No," she said shortly; and, dismissing that phase of the subject in the single word: "Let's talk

about the story. You have bettered it immensely. What made you do it?"

"I don't know; some convincement that it was all wrong and out of drawing as it stood, I suppose."

"Who gave you the convincement? Miss Farnham?"

His answer was meant to be truthful, but beauty of the intoxicating sort is the most mordant of solvents for truth in the abstract.

"No; you did."

"But she told you something," she persisted. "Otherwise, you could never have made *Fidelia* all over again, as you have in this rewriting."

"Maybe she did," he admitted. "But that doesn't matter. You think I have bettered the story, and I know I have. And I know where I got the inspiration to do it."

She was smiling across at him, level-eyed.

"Let me pass it back to you, dear boy," she said. "You have the making of a great novelist in you. It may take years and years, and—and I'm afraid you'll always have to be helped; but if you can only get the right kind of help. . . ." She looked away, out across the lake where a fitful breeze was turning the molten-metal dimples into laughing wavelets. Then, with one of her sudden topic-wrenchings: "Speaking of help, reminds me. Why didn't you tell me you had gone into the foundry business with Edward Raymer?"

"Because it didn't occur to me that you would care to know, I guess," he answered unsuspectingly.

"As a matter of fact, I had almost forgotten it myself."

"Was it a good investment?" she asked guilelessly.

"Yes; that is, I presume it was. I didn't think much about that part of it."

"What did you think about?"

It was just here that he awoke to the realization that he could hardly afford to give Jasper Grierson's daughter the real reason for the investment. So he prevaricated, knowing well enough that he had less than no chance in an evasive duel with her.

"Raymer had been adding to his plant, and he lacked capital," he said guardedly. "I had the money, and it was lying idle."

"Mr. Raymer didn't ask you for help?"

"No; it was my own offer."

"But he did tell you that he was in trouble?"

"Y-yes," hesitantly.

"What kind of trouble was it, Kenneth? I have the best right in the world to know."

Griswold straightened himself in his chair and the work-weariness became a thing of the past. With the fairly evident fact staring him in the face from day to day, it had never occurred to him that his friend and business partner might also be his fellow-prisoner in the house of the witcheries. The sudden convincement stung a little, the all-monopolizing selfishness of the craftsman carrying easily over into the field of sentiment. Yet it was clean friendship for Raymer, no less than for the daughter of desire, that prompted him to say:

"You can't have a right to know anything that will distress you."

"Foolish!" she chided—and this time the epithet had lost its alluring softness. "You may as well tell me. Mr. Raymer had borrowed money at poppa's bank. What was the matter? Did he have to pay it back—all at once?"

There seemed to be no further opening for evasion. "Yes; I think that was the way of it," he answered.

Arguing wholly from the newly made discovery, or postulated discovery, of Raymer's state and standing as an object of Miss Grierson's solicitude, Griswold expected something in the nature of an outburst. What he got was a transfixing glance of the passionate sort, quick with open-eyed admiration.

"And you just tossed your money into the breach as if you had millions of it, and by now you've almost forgotten that you did it!" she exclaimed. "Kenneth, dear, there are times when you are so heavenly good that I can hardly believe it. Are there any more men like you over on your side of the world?"

At another time he might have smiled at the boyish frankness of the question. But it was a better motive than the analyst's that prompted his answer.

"Plenty of them, Margery, girl; too many for the good of the race. You mustn't try to make a hero out of me. Once in a while I get a glimpse of the real Kenneth Griswold—you are giving me one just now—and it's sickening. For a moment I was meanly jealous; jealous of Raymer. It was only the writing part of me, I hope, but——"

He stopped because she had suddenly turned her back on him and was looking out over the lake again. When she spoke, she went back to the business affair.

"When you invest money you ought to look after it," she said magisterially. "You are a Socialist, aren't you? How do you know that your money isn't being used to oppress somebody?"

"Oh, I do know that much," was the investor's protest. "Raymer is a good boss—too good for the crowd he is trying to brother, I'm afraid."

"What makes you say that?"

"A word or two that he has dropped, now and then. When he branched out, he had to increase his force accordingly. Some of the new men seem inclined to make trouble."

Again she fell silent, and he saw the brooding look come into the dark eyes. It was evident that something he had said had started a train of thought—and the thoughts were not altogether pleasant ones. Analyzing again, he fancied he could picture the inward struggle to break away from the unpleasantnesses, and he shook hands enthusiastically with his own gift of insight when she looked up suddenly and said: "See! the breeze is freshening out on the water. You are fagged and tired and needing a bracer. Let's go and do a turn on the lake in the *Clytie*."

From where he was sitting Griswold could see the trim little catboat, resplendent in polished brass and mahogany, riding at its buoy beyond the lawn

landing-stage. He cared little for the water, but the invitation pointed to a delightful prolongation of the basking process which had come to be one of the chief luxuries of the Mereside afternoons.

"I'm not much of a sailor," he began; but she cut him off.

"You'll do to pull and haul. Wait for me; I'll be ready in less time than it would take another woman—*Fidelia*, for example—to make up her mind what she wanted to wear."

He waited; and when she came down, a few minutes later, crisply boyish in the nattiest of yachting costumes, he wondered how she could appear in so many different characters, fitting each in succession and contriving always to make the latest transformation, while it lasted, the one in which she figured as the most enticingly adorable.

"Did you look in the glass before you came down?" he asked, standing up to get the artistic effect of the shapely little figure backgrounded against the dull reds of the house wall.

"Naturally," she laughed. "Why, please? Is my face dirty?"

He ignored the flippancy.

"If you did, I don't need to tell you how irresistibly dazzling you are."

"Why shouldn't you, if you feel like it? Of course, I'd know you didn't mean it. If you were describing me to somebody else, or in the book, you'd say, 'Um, yes; rather fetching; pretty enough to—' But we all like to be sugared a little now and

then; and there's one thing you must always remember: a woman's dressing-glass can't talk. Are you ready? Open the window screen and drop the manuscript inside. It will be safe until we come back, and the *Clytie* might be tempted to throw cold water on it if we should take it along. She's a wet little boat in a sea."

This for the outsetting: light-hearted badinage, a fair summer afternoon, a zephyrish breeze coming in tiny cat's-paws out of the north-west, and a cloudless sky. At the landing-stage Griswold made himself useful, paying out the sea-line of the movable mooring buoy and hauling on the shore-line until the handsome little craft lay at their feet. Strictly under orders he made sail on the little ship, and when the captain had taken her place at the tiller he shoved off.

For a little time the breeze was lightly baffling, and Griswold confessed that if he had been at the helm they would have gone ingloriously aground. But the small person in the correct yachting costume was an adept in boat handling, as she seemed to be in everything else; and when the sandy bottom was fairly yellowing under the *Clytie's* counter, there was a quick juggling of the tiller, a deft haul at the sheet, and the big main-sail filled slowly to the rippling song of the little seas splitting themselves upon the catboat's sharp cut-water.

Once clear of the shallow bay, the helmswoman laid the course up the lake; and Griswold, luxuriously lazy now that the working strain was off,

stretched himself comfortably on the cockpit cushions which he had rummaged out of the cuddy cabin, and asked permission to light his pipe. The permission given and the pipe filled and lighted, he pillowed his head in his clasped hands and a great contentment, flowing into all the interstices and levelling all the inequalities, lapped him in its soothing flood. When the pipe had gone out there was joy enough left in the pure relaxation; in that and in the contemplation through half-closed eyelids of the pretty picture made by the tiller maiden braced in the stern-sheets, her shining hair breeze-blown and flying free under the captivating little yachting hat, and her eyes dancing. . . .

Under such conditions a reflective analyst might conceivably wrench the switch aside in front of the jogging train of thought to send it down a shaded street to the lake-fronting house framed in shrubbery; to the house and to the serene young house-mistress who had voluntarily stepped from her goddess pedestal to become a flesh-and-blood woman to be loved and cherished. He knew that Charlotte Farnham's readjustment of their relations had in no wise modified her opinion of the *Joans*, or of the men who were weak enough or besotted enough to be taken in the nets of beguiling. . . . What would she think of him if she could see him lying at Margery Grierson's feet, frankly and joyously revelling in the triumphantly human charm of one of the *Joans*, and wishing with all his heart—for the time being, at least—that there were no such things in a

world of effort as the higher ideals or any shackling requirement to live up to them?

He was still playing whimsically with the query when he was made to realize that the murmuring rush of water under the catboat's forefoot had changed into a series of resounding thumps; that the wind was rising, and that the summer afternoon sky had become suddenly overcast. The pretty tiller maiden was pushing the helm down with her foot and hauling in briskly on the sheet when he sat up.

"What's this we're coming to?" he asked, thinking less of the changed weather conditions than of the charming picture she made in action.

"Weather," she said shortly. "Look behind you."

He looked and saw a huge storm cloud rising out of the north-west and spreading like a great gray dust curtain from horizon to zenith. With the sun blotted out, a brazen light filled all the upper air, and in the heart of the cloud fleecy masses of vapor were writhing and twisting like formless giants in battle.

Quickly he measured the hazards. The *Clytie* was fairly in mid-lake, with plenty of sea room to leeward. There was an intervening island to shut off the down-lake view, but though its forested bluffs and abrupt headland were uncomfortably close at hand, a bit of skilful manœuvring would put it to windward. Beyond the island he could see the breeze-blown smoke trail of the summer-resort hotel's steam launch evidently making for its home port at full speed.

"There's a good bunch of wind in that cloud," he said, springing to help his companion with the slatting main-sail. "Hadn't we better lie up under the island and let it blow over?"

"No," she snapped. "We'll have to reef, and be quick about it. Help me!"

He helped with the reefing, and the great main-sail had been successfully reduced to its smallest area and hoisted home again before the trees on the western shore began to bow and churn in the precursor blasts of the coming storm.

"It will hit us in less than a minute: how about weathering that island?" he asked.

"We've *got* to weather it," was the instant decision; "we can't go around." Then, the catboat still hanging in the wind's eye: "Help me get her over."

Together they held the shortened sail off at an angle, and slowly, very slowly, the boat's bow fell off toward the island. Griswold was enough of a sailor to know that it was the thing to do, but there was a perilously narrow margin. The storm squall was already tearing across from the western shore, blackening the water ahead of it and picking up a small tidal wave as it came. If it should strike them before they were ready for it, it meant one of two things: a capsize, or an instant driving of the catboat upon the hazard of the island head.

The crisis was upon them almost as soon as its threat could be measured. Of the two, it was the young woman who met it with skilful purpose. While the man could only scramble, choked and

half-blinded, to windward to throw his weight on the careening gunwale, the helmswoman had pounced upon the tiller and was standing knee-deep in the water pouring over the submerged lee rail to pay out and steer and miss the island headland by a shearing hand's-breadth.

The worst was over in a moment, and under the lee of the small island there was a brief respite for pumping and bailing. The girl's black eyes were shining with excitement and fearless daring, and Griswold would have given much for time and leisure in which to catch and fix the fleeting inspiration of the instant. But there was little space for the artistic appreciation.

"Hurry!" she cried; "we'll have to take it again in a minute or two!" and there was still a bucketing of the shipped sea to thrash about in the cockpit when the island withdrew its friendly shelter and the *Clytie*, going free and sailed as Griswold had never seen a catboat sailed before, wallowed out into the smother.

For a little time there was not much to choose between drowning and being hammered to death by the leaping plunges and alightings of the frail cockle-shell which seemed to be blown bodily from crest to crest of the short, high-pitched seas. The wind, heavily rain-laden, came in furious gusts, flattening the reefed canvas until the bunt of the sail dragged in the trough. Griswold climbed high on the weather rail, leaning far out to help hold the balance between the heaving seas and the pound-

ing blasts. In the momentary lulls he had flitting glimpses of the far-away town shore, with the storm-torn waste of waters intervening. With the wind veering more and more to the west, it was a fair run to the shelter of the home bay. But Margery was laying the course far to the right, though to do it she was holding the catboat cockpit-deep in the smother and taking the chance of a capsize with every recurring gust. Griswold edged his way aft as far as he dared.

"Hadn't you better let her fall off a little more and run for it?" he suggested, and he had to shout it into the pink ear nearest to him to make himself heard above the roaring of the wind and the crashing plunges of the boat.

She shook her head and made an impatient little gesture with her elbow toward the storm-lashed raceway over the bows. Griswold winked the spray out of his eyes and looked. At first he saw nothing but the wild waste of whitecaps, but at the next attempt he made out the hotel steam launch, halfway to the entrance of the southern bay and a little to leeward of the *Clytie's* course. The small steamer was evidently no sea-boat, and with more courage than seamanship, its steersman was driving straight for the Inn bay without regard for the direction of the wind and the seas.

"That's Ole Halverson!" cried the tiller maiden with scorn in her voice. "He thinks because he happens to have a steam engine he needn't look to see which way the wind is blowing."

"She's pitching pretty badly," Griswold called back. "If he only had sense enough to ease off a little. . . ." Suddenly he became aware of the finer heroism of his companion. He knew now why she had refused to take shelter under the lee of the island, and why she was holding the catboat down to the edge of peril to keep the windward advantage of the laboring steamer. "Margery, girl, you're a darling!" he shouted. "Take all the chances you want to and I'm with you, if we go to the bottom!"

She nodded complete intelligence and took in another inch of the straining main-sheet.

"If Halverson loses his nerve they're going to need help, and need it before the *Osprey* can get out to them," she prophesied.

Griswold looked again, this time over the catboat's counter, and saw a big schooner, close-reefed, hauling out from a little bay on the north shore. The launch's plight had evidently impressed others with the necessity of doing something. The need was sufficiently urgent. Once again the Swedish man of machinery in charge of the craft in peril was inching his helm up in a vain endeavor to hold the course, and the little steamer was rolling almost funnel under. Griswold forgot that his companion was a woman and swore rabidly.

"Look at the fool!" he yelled. "He's trying to come about! If he gets into the trough——"

The thing was done almost as he spoke. A wilder squall than any of the preceding ones caught the upper works of the launch and heeled her spitefully.

At the critical instant the steersman lost his head and spun the wheel, and it was all over. With a heaving plunge and a muffled explosion the launch was gone.

Once again Griswold was given to see the stuff Margery Grierson was made of in the finer warp and woof of her.

"That's for us," she said calmly; and then: "Help me get another inch or two on this sheet. We don't want to let those people on the *Osprey* do all of the heroic things."

Together they held the catboat down to its work, sending it ripping through the crested waves and fighting sturdily for every foot of the precious windward advantage. None the less, it was the big schooner, thrashing down the wind with every square yard of its reefed canvas drawing, which was first at the scene of disaster. Through the rain and spume they could see the schooner's crew picking up the shipwrecked passengers, who were clinging to life-belts, broken bulkheads, and anything that would float. So swiftly was the rescue effected that the rescuer had luffed and filled and was tearing on its way down the lake again when the close-hauled *Clytie* came up with the first of the floating wreckage. The tiller maiden's dark eyes were shining again, but this time their brightness was of tears.

"Oh, boy, boy!" she cried, with a little heart-broken catch in her voice; "some of them must have gone down with her! Can you believe that the *Osprey* got them all?" And then, with the sweet

lips trembling: "I did my best, Kenneth; my very best: and—it wasn't—good enough!"

She was putting the catboat up into the wind, and Griswold stumbled forward to get the broader outlook. Suddenly he called back to her.

"Port!—port your helm hard! there's a man in a life-belt—he's just out of reach. Hold her there—steady—steady!" He had thrown himself flat, face down, on the half-deck forward and was clutching at something in the heaving seas. "I've got him!" he cried, and a moment later he was working his way aft, holding the man's face out of water.

It asked for their united strength to get the gray-haired, heavy-bodied victim of the capsize over the *Clytie's* rail. They had to bring the life-belt too; the old man's fingers were sunk into it with a dying grip that could not be broken. At first Griswold was too much preoccupied and shocked to recognize the drawn face with its hard-lined mouth and long upper lip. When he did recognize it the gripping fear was at his heart—the fear that makes a cruel coward of the hunted thing in all nature.

What might have happened if he had been alone; if Margery, taking her place at the tiller and busying herself swiftly in getting the catboat under way again, had not been looking on; he dared not think. And that other frightful thought he put away, fighting against it madly as a condemned man might push the cup of hemlock from his lips. Forcibly breaking the drowned one's hold upon the

life-belt, he fell to work energetically, resorting to the first-aid expedients for the reviving of the drowned as he had learned them in his boyhood. Once, only, he flung a word over his shoulder at Margery as he fought for the old man's life. "Make for the nearest landing where we can get a doctor!" he commanded; and then, in a passion of gratitude: "O God, I thank thee that I am not a murderer!—he's coming back! he's breathing again!"

A little later he was able to leave off the first-aid arm-pumpings and chest-pressings; to straighten the limp and sprawling limbs, and to dive into the cuddy cabin, under Margery's directions, for blankets and rugs. When all was done that could be done, and he had propped the blanket-swathed body with the cushions so that the crash and plunge of the pitching catboat would be minimized for the sufferer, he went aft to sit beside the helmswoman, who was getting the final wave-leap of speed out of the little vessel.

"He is alive?" she asked.

"Yes; and that is about all that can be said. He isn't drowned; but he is old, and the shock has gone pretty near to snapping the thread."

"Of course, you remember him?" she said, looking away across the leaping waters.

Griswold, with his heart on fire with generous emotions, felt the cold hand gripping him again.

"He is the old gentleman you introduced me to at the Inn the other day: Galbraith; is that the name?"

"Yes," she rejoined, still looking away; "that is the name."

Griswold fell silent for the time; but a little later, when the catboat was rushing in long plunges through the entrance to the Wahaskan arm of the lake, he said: "You are going to take him to Mereside?"

"Yes. He is a friend of poppa's. And, anyway, it's the nearest place, and you said there was no time to lose."

There were anxious watchers on the Mereside landing-stage: the gardener, the stable-man, Thorsen, and three or four others. When the landing was safely made, Miss Grierson took command and issued her orders briskly.

"Four of you carry Mr. Galbraith up to the house, and you, Thorsen, put Baldur into the two-wheeled trap and be ready to go for Doctor Farnham when I tell you where you can find him. Johnnie Fergus, you come here and take care of the *Clytie;* you know how to furl down and moor her."

Griswold helped the bearers lift the blanketed figure out of the *Clytie's* cockpit, and while he was doing it, the steel-gray eyes of the rescued one opened slowly to fix a stony gaze upon the face of the man who was bending over him. What the thin lips were muttering Griswold heard, and so did one other. "So it's you, is it, ye murdering blue-eyed deevil?" And then: "Eh, man, man, but I'm sick!"

Griswold walked with Margery at the tail of the

little procession as it wound its way up the path to the great house.

"You heard what he said?" he inquired craftily.

"Yes: he is out of his head, and no wonder," she said soberly. Then: "You must go home and change at once; you are drenched to the skin. Don't wait to come in. I'll take care of your manuscript."

XXX

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

The cyclonic summer storm had blown itself out, and the clouds were beginning to break away in the west, when Griswold, obeying Margery's urging to go home and change his clothes, turned his back upon Mereside and his face toward a future of thickening doubts and unnerving possibilities.

Once more he found himself wrestling with the keeper of the gate, the angel of the flaming sword set to drive him forth among the outcasts. One by one the confidently imagined safeguards were crumbling. He had been traced to Wahaska—so much could be read between the lines of Charlotte Farnham's story; if Margery's newsboy protégé was to be believed, he was watched and followed. And now, after having successfully passed the ordeal of a face-to-face meeting and hand-shaking with Andrew Galbraith, chance or destiny or the powers of darkness had intervened, and a danger met and vanquished had been suddenly brought to life again, armed and menacing.

Griswold had not deceived himself, nor had he allowed Margery's apparent convincement to deceive him. The old man's mind had not been wandering

in the eye-opening moment of consciousness regained. On the contrary, what he had failed to do under ordinary and conventional conditions had become instantly possible when the plunge into the dark shadow had brushed away all the artificial beclouddings of the memory page. What action he would take when he should recover was as easy to prefigure as it was, for the present at least, a matter negligible. The dismaying thing was that the broad earth seemed too narrow to hide in; that invention itself became the clumsiest of blunderers when it was given the simple task of losing a single individual among the millions of unrelated human atoms.

Thus the threat of the peril which might be called the physical. But beyond this there was another, and, for a man of temperament, a still more ominous foreshadowing of evil to come. Of some subtle, deep-seated change in himself he had long been conscious. Again and again it had manifested itself in those moments of craven fear and ruthless, murderous promptings, when kindliness, gratitude, love, all the humanizing motives, had turned suddenly to frenzied hatred, and the primitive savage had leaped up, fiercely raging with the blood-lust.

Here, again, he suffered loss, and was conscious of it. The point of view was changed, and still changing. Something, a thing indefinable, but none the less real, had gone out of him. Once, in the heart of a thick darkness of squalor and misery, he had seen a great light and the name of it was love for his kind. But now the light was waning, and

in its room a bale-fire was beckoning. There be those, fat, well-nurtured, and complacent souls faring ever along the main-travelled roads of life, who need no guiding lamp and will never see the glimmer of the bale-fires. But the breaker of traditions was of those who, having once seen the light, must follow where it leads or violate a primal law of being. Some vague sense of this was stirring the dying embers for the proletary as he was climbing the hill to the street of quiet entrances; but he pushed the saving thought aside and chose to call it fanaticism. He had drawn the line and he would hew to it.

For a long time after he had reached his room, and had had his bath and change, Griswold sat at his writing-table with his head in his hands, thinking in monotonous circles. As in those other stressful moments, the importunate devil was at his ear; now mocking him for not having left the drowned enemy as he was; now whispering the dreadful hope that age and the shock and the drowning might still re-erect the barrier of safety. The eyes of the recusant grew hot and a loathsome fever ran sluggishly through his veins when he realized the depths to which he had descended; that he, once the brother-loving, could coldly weigh the chance of life and death for another and be unable to find in any corner of his heart the hope that life might prevail.

He was still sitting, miserably reflective, in the dark, when Mrs. Holcomb came up to call him to dinner. What excuse he made he could not remember two minutes after she had gone down.

But to make a fourth with the motherly widow and her two bank clerks at the cheerful dinner-table was a thing beyond him. Somewhat later he heard the two young men come upstairs, and, still further along, go down again. They were social souls, his two fellow lodgers; kindly young fellows with boyish faces and honest eyes: Griswold wondered if they would still look up to him and defer to him as the older man of broader culture if they could know. . . .

The tiny chiming clock on his dressing-case in the adjoining bedroom had tinkled forth its ten tapping hammer strokes when the man sitting in the dark heard the pounding of hoofs and the rattling of buggy wheels in the quiet street. He was absently awaking to the fact that the vehicle had stopped at his own door when he heard voices, the widow's and another, in the lower hall, and then a man's footsteps on the stair. To a hard-pressed breaker of the traditions at such a moment an unannounced visitor, coming up in the dark, could mean but one thing. Griswold silently opened a drawer in the writing-table and groped for the mate to the quick-firing pistol which, after the change of wet clothing, he had put aside to dry.

The visitor came heavily upstairs, and Griswold, swinging his chair to face the open door, saw the shadowy bulking of the man as he came through the upper hall. When the bulk filled the doorway it was covered by the pistol held low, and Griswold's finger was pressing the trigger.

"Asleep, old man?" said the intruder in Raymer's well-known voice.

There was a sound like a gasping sob, and another as of a drawer closing softly. Then Griswold said: "No; I'm not asleep. Come in. Shall I light the gas?"

"Not for me," returned the bedtime visitor, entering and groping for the chair at the desk-end, into which, when he had placed it, he dropped wearily. "I want to smoke," he went on. "Have you got a cigar—no, not the pipe; I want something that I can chew on."

A cigar was found, in the drawer which had so lately furnished the weapon, and by the flare of the match in Raymer's fingers Griswold saw a face haggard with anxiety. In the kindlier days it had been one of his redeeming characteristics that he could never dwell long upon his own harassments when another's troubles were brought to him.

"What is the matter, Edward?" he asked.

"A mix-up with the labor unions. It's been brewing for some little time, but I didn't want to worry you with it. Unless we announce a flat increase of twenty per cent in wages to-morrow morning, and declare for the closed shop, the men will go out on us at noon. I've seen it coming. It began with the enlarging of the plant and the taking on of the new men needed. We've always had the open shop, as you know, and it was all right so long as we were too small for the unions to scrap about. But now we get the Iron Workers' ulti-

matum: we can do as we please about the profit-sharing; but the flat increase must go on the pay-rolls, and the shop must be run as a closed shop."

If the god of mischance had chosen the moment it could not have been more opportune for the fire-lighting of malevolence. Griswold's swing-chair righted itself with a click, and Bainbridge's prophecy that a hot-hearted proletary was likely to become the hardest of masters became a prediction fulfilled.

"We'll see them in hell, first, Raymer! Isn't that the way you feel about it?"

"Partly," allowed the smoker. "But it can hardly be disposed of that easily, Kenneth. A good third of the men are our old standbys; men who were in the shops under my father. Some pretty powerful influence has been brought to bear upon them to swing them against us. I don't know what it is, but I do know this: every second man we have hired lately has turned out to be either a loud-mouthed agitator or a silent mixer of trouble medicine.

"Let the causes go for the present," said Griswold shortly. "We're talking about the men, now. The ungrateful beggars are merely proving that it isn't in human nature to meet justice and fairness and generous liberality half-way. If they want a fight, give it to them. Hit first and hit hard; that's the way to do. Shut up the plant and make it a lock-out."

"I was afraid you might say something like that in the first heat of it," said the young ironmaster. "It's a stout fighting word, and I guess, under the

skin, you're a stout fighting man, Kenneth—which I'm not. Where are your convictions about the man-to-man obligations? We've got to take them into the account, haven't we?"

"Damn the convictions!" snapped Griswold viciously. "If I've been giving you the impression that I'm an impracticable theorist, forget it. These fellows want a fight: I say give them a fight—all they want of it and a little more for good measure."

Raymer did not reply at once. This latest Griswold was puzzling him, and with the puzzlement there went sorrowful regret; the regret that has been the recanter's portion in all the ages. When he spoke it was out of the heart of common sense and sanity.

"I know how you feel about it; I had a little attack of the same sort this afternoon when the grievance committee dropped down on me. But facts are pretty stubborn things, and they've got us foul. We have twenty thousand dollars' worth of work for the Pineboro road on the shop tracks, and the trouble-makers have picked their opportunity. If we can't turn out this work, we'll lose the Pineboro's business, which, as I have told you, is a pretty big slice of our business. Under such conditions I don't dare to pull down a fight which may not only shut us up for an indefinite time, but might even go far enough to smash us."

Griswold took his turn of silence, rocking gently in the tilting chair. When the delayed rejoinder came, the harshness had gone out of his voice, but there was a cynical hardness to take its place.

"It's your affair; not mine," he said. "If you've made up your mind not to fight, of course, that settles it. Now we can come down to the causes. You've been stabbed in the back. Do you know who's doing it?"

"The Federated Iron Workers, I suppose."

"Not in a thousand years! They are only the means to an end." The tilting chair squeaked again, and he went on: "If I'm going to show you how you can dodge this fight, I'll have to knock down a door or two first. If I blunder in where I'm not wanted, you can kick me out. There is one way in which you can cure all this trouble-sickness without resorting to surgery and blood-letting."

"Name it," said Raymer eagerly.

"I will; but first I'll have to break over into the personalities. Have you made up your mind that you are going to marry Margery Grierson?"

Raymer laughed silently, leaning his head back on the cushion of the lazy-chair until his cigar stood upright.

"That's a nice way to biff a man in the dark!" he chuckled. "But if you're in earnest I'll tell you the straightforward truth: I don't know."

"Why don't you know?" If there were a scowl to go with the query, Raymer could not see it.

"I'll be frank with you again, Kenneth. What little sentiment there is in me leans pretty heavily that way. You have been with her a good bit and you know her—know how she appeals to any man with a drop of red blood in him. But I'm twenty-

eight years old and well past the time when the young man's fancy lightly turns—and all that. I can't ignore the—the—well, the proprieties, you might say, though that isn't exactly the word."

"You mean that Margery Grierson doesn't measure up to the requirements of the Wahaskan Four Hundred?" There was satirical scorn in the observation, but Raymer did not perceive it.

"Oh, I don't know as you would put it quite that baldly," he protested. "But you see, when it comes to marrying and settling down and raising a family, you have to look at all sides of the thing. The father, as we all know, is a cold-blooded old werewolf; the mother nobody knows anything about save that—happily, in all probability—she isn't living. And there you are. Yet I won't deny that there are times when I'm tempted to shut my eyes and take the high dive, anyway—at the risk of splashing a lot of good people who would doubtless be properly scandalized."

By this time Griswold was gripping the arms of his chair savagely and otherwise trying to hold himself down; but this, too, Raymer could not know.

"You have reason to believe that it rests wholly with you, I suppose?" came from the tilting chair after a little pause. "Miss Grierson is only waiting for you to speak?"

"That's a horrible question to ask a man, Kenneth—even in the dark. If I say yes to it, it can't sound any other way than boastful and—and caddish. Yet I honestly believe that— Oh, hang it all!

can't you see how impossible you're making it, old man?"

"Not impossible; only a trifle difficult," was the qualifying rejoinder. "It is easier from this on. That is the peaceful way out of the shop trouble for you, Raymer. When you can go to Jasper Grierson and tell him you are going to marry his daughter, the trouble will be as good as cured."

For a little time Raymer was speechless. Then he burst out.

"Well, I'll be— Jove, Griswold, you don't lack much of being as cold-blooded as the old buccaneer himself! What makes you think he is stirring up the trouble?"

"It doesn't require any special thought. He wanted to freeze you out a little while back, and you balked him. Now he has come back at you another way."

"I wonder!" said the iron-founder musingly; and then: "I more than half believe you are right. But if you are, do you realize what you are proposing?"

"I am not proposing anything; I am merely suggesting. But you needn't put in the factor of doubt. This labor trouble that is threatening to smash you is Jasper Grierson's reply to the move you made when you let me in and choked him off. He is reaching for you."

Again Raymer held his peace and the atmosphere of the room grew pungent with tobacco smoke.

"I'm feeling a good bit like a yellow dog, Kenneth," he said, at length. "After what I've admitted and

what you've said, I'm left in the position of the poor devil who would be damned if he did and be damned if he didn't. You have succeeded in fixing it so that I *can't* ask Margery Grierson to be my wife, however much I'd like to."

"That isn't the point," insisted Griswold half-savagely. "How you may feel about it, or what your people may say, is purely secondary. The thing to be considered is, what will happen to Miss Grierson?"

"Oh, the devil! if you put it that way——"

"I am putting it precisely that way."

"Why, see here, old man; if you were Madge's brother, you couldn't be putting the screws on any harder! What's got into you to-night?"

Griswold was inexorable.

"Miss Grierson hasn't any brother, and she might as well not have any father—better, perhaps. As God hears me, Raymer, I'm going to see to it that she gets a square deal."

"In other words, if she has made up her clever little mind that she wants to be Mrs. Ed. Raymer——"

"That is it, exactly."

"By George! I believe you are in love with her, yourself!"

"I am," was the cool reply.

"Well, of all the— Say, Griswold, you're a three-cornered puzzle to me yet. I don't know what the other three-fourths of the town is saying, but my fourth of it has it put up that you've everlastingly cooked my goose at Doctor Bertie's; that you and

Charlotte are just about as good as engaged. Perhaps you'll tell me that it isn't true."

"It isn't—yet."

"But it may be, later on? Now you are getting over into my little garden-patch, Kenneth. If you think I'm going to stand still and see you put a wedding ring on Charlotte Farnham's finger when I know you'd like to be putting it on Madge Grierson's——"

Griswold's low laugh came as an easing of stresses.

"You can't very well marry both of them, yourself, you know," he suggested mildly. And then: "If you were not so badly torn up over this shop trouble, you'd see that I'm trying to give you the entire field. I shall probably leave town to-morrow, and I merely wanted to do you, or Miss Grierson, or both of you, a small kindness by way of leave-taking."

"Leave town?" echoed the iron-founder. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know yet."

"But you are coming back?"

"No."

Once more Raymer puffed at the shortened cigar until the end of it glowed like a small distress signal in the dark.

"Tell me," he broke out finally: "has Margery Grierson turned you down?"

"No."

"Then Charlotte has?"

"No."

"Confound it all! can't you say anything but

'No'? Do you mean to tell me that you are going away, leaving me bucked and gagged by this labor outfit to live or die as I may? Great Scott, man! if my money's gone, yours goes with it!"

"You are freely welcome to the money, Edward —if you can manage to hang on to it; and I have pointed out the easy way to salvage the industrial ship. Can't you give me your blessing and let me go in peace?"

The blessing was not withheld, but neither was it given.

"I came here with my own back-load of trouble, but it seems that I'm not the only camel in the caravan," said the young ironmaster, thoughtfully. "What is it, Kenneth? anything you can unload on me?"

"You wouldn't understand," was the gentle evasion. "I can only give you my word that neither Miss Margery nor Miss Charlotte are in any way concerned in it."

"And you don't want to draw your money out of the plant?"

"No. For your sake I wish I had more to put in."

Once again Raymer took refuge in silence. After a time he said: "You've been a brother to me, Griswold, and I shall never forget that. But if I needed your help in the money pinch, I'm needing it worse now. I'll do the right thing by Margery; I think I've been meaning to, all along; if I haven't, it's only because this whole town has been fixing up a match between Charlotte and me ever since we

were school kids together—you know how a fellow gets into the way of taking a thing like that for granted merely because everybody else does?"

"Yes; I know."

"Well, I guess it isn't a heart-breaker on either side. If Charlotte cares, she doesn't take the trouble to show it. Just the same, on the other hand, I've got a shred or two of decency left, Kenneth. I'm not going to marry myself out of this fight with Jasper Grierson—not in a million years. Stay over and help me see it through; and when we win out, I promise you I'll do the square thing."

By no means could Edward Raymer know that he had set the whispering devil at work again at the ear of the man who was rocking gently in the desk-chair. But the demon was busily suggesting, and the man was listening. Was there not more than an even chance that Andrew Galbraith would die, after all? He was old, with the life-reserves spent and the weight of the years upon him. And if he should not die, there was still a chance that days might elapse before he would be able to gather himself sufficiently to remember and to raise the hue and cry. Griswold put a hot hand across the corner of the table and felt for Raymer's cool one.

"There's only one other way, Edward; and that is to fight like the devil," he said, speaking as one who has weighed and measured and decided. "What do you say?"

"If you will stay," Raymer began, hesitantly.

"I'll stay—as long as I can." Then, with the

note of harshness returning: "We'll make the fight, and we'll give these muckers of yours all they are looking for. Shut the plant doors to-morrow morning and make it a lock-out. I'll be over bright and early and we'll place a bunch of wire orders in the cities for strike-breakers. That will bring them to time."

Raymer got up slowly and felt in the dark for his hat.

"Strike-breakers!" he groaned. "Griswold, it would make my father turn over in his coffin if he could know that we've come to that! But I guess you're right. Everybody says I'm too soft-hearted to be a master of men. Well, I must be getting home. To-morrow morning, at the plant? All right; good-night."

And he turned to grope his way to the door and through the dark upper hall and down the stair.

XXXI

NARROWING WALLS

When Griswold had reached across the corner of his writing-table in the unlighted study to strike hands with Edward Raymer upon the promise to stay and help, it is conceivable that he gave the impelling motive its just due. To step aside was to become a fugitive, leaving a fugitive's plain trail and half-confession of guilt behind him to direct the pursuit. To stay and face the crisis coldly was equally out of the question for a man of temperament. The call to action came as a draught of fiery wine to the overspent and he accepted in a sudden upsurge of self-centring that took nothing into the account save the welcome excitement of a conflict.

It was with rather more than less of the self-centring that he joined the conference with Raymer and the shop bosses in the offices of the plant the following morning. Having slept upon the quarrel, Raymer was on the conciliatory hand, and four of the five department foremen were with him. In the early hours of the forenoon a compromise was still possible. The prompt closing of the shops had had its effect, and a deputation of the older workmen came to plead for arbitration and a peaceful settle-

ment of the trouble. Raymer, who had evidently been taking counsel with his womankind, would have consented to this proposal, but Griswold fought it and finally carried his point. "No compromise" was the answer sent back to the locked-out workmen, and with it went the ultimatum, which Griswold himself snapped out at the leader of the conciliators: "Tell your committee that it is unconditional surrender, and it must be made before five o'clock this afternoon. Otherwise, not a man of you can come back on any terms."

At the hurling of this firebrand, three of the five department heads drew their pay-envelopes and went away. Then Griswold proceeded to make the breach impassable by calling upon the sheriff for a guard of deputies. Raymer shook his head gloomily when the thrower of firebrands sent the 'phone message to the sheriff's office.

"That settles it beyond any hope of a patch-up," he said sorrowfully. "If we hadn't declared war before, we've done it now. I'm prophesying that nobody will weaken when it comes to the pay-roll test this afternoon."

"Because we have taken steps to protect our property?" rasped the fighting partner.

"Because we have taken the step which serves notice upon them that we consider them criminals, at least in intention. You'd resent it yourself, Griswold. If anybody should pull the law on you before you had done anything to deserve it, I'm much mistaken if you wouldn't——"

"Oh, hell!" was the biting interruption; and Raymer could not know upon what inward fires he had unwittingly flung a handful of inflammables.

It was during the paying-off interval in the afternoon that Broffin strolled across the railroad tracks, and, after listening to one or two of the incendiary speeches at the storm-centre mass meeting in front of McGuire's, went on past the potteries to the Raymer plant.

Several things had happened since the afternoon when he had sat behind the sheltering window curtain in the writing-room of the summer-resort hotel listening to Miss Grierson's story. For one, Teller Johnson, of the Bayou State Security, had pleaded his inability to leave his post unless ordered to do so by the president: the cashier was sick and the bank was short-handed. For another, there had been a peppery protest entered by the good Doctor Bertie—transformed for the moment into an exasperated Doctor Bertie. If Broffin did not quit his annoying espionage upon the house in Lake Boulevard, and upon the visitors thereto, there was going to be trouble, and he, Doctor Bertie, would be the trouble-maker. For a third untoward thing, he had found that Wahaska as a community was beginning to look a little askance at him. The village consciousness which had made it so easy for him to find out all he wished to know about everybody was turning against him, and now, as it seemed, everybody was wishing to know more than he cared to tell about the past, present, and future con-

cerns of one Matthew Broffin: in short, he was becoming a suspicious character.

Broffin the pertinacious, again with an unlighted cigar between his teeth, was ruminating thoughtfully over these things when he came in sight of the closed gates and smokeless chimneys of the Foundry and Machine Works. Once more the scent had grown cold. Miss Grierson's story had seemed to clear Griswold—if anything short of a court acquittal could clear him; and in the peppery interview Doctor Farnham had told him plainly that, if Mr. Griswold were the object of his attentions, he was barking up the wrong tree; that Miss Farnham would, if necessary, go into court and testify that Mr. Griswold was not the man whom she had seen in the Bayou State Security. Also, Griswold was doing something for himself. It was he who had pulled Mr. Galbraith out of the lake little better than a dead man, and had brought him to life again; and now he was taking an active part in the foundry fight—about the last thing that might be expected of a man dodging the police.

In spite of all these buffetings the man from Tennessee was only bruised; not beaten. It is possible to be convinced without evidence; to believe without being able to prove. Also, convincement may grow into certainty as the evidence to support it becomes altogether incertitude. Broffin was as sure now that Griswold was his man as he was of his own present inability to prove it. Which is to say that he had discounted Miss Farnham's

refusal to help, and President Galbraith's refusal to remember; was discounting Miss Grierson's skilfully told story, and Griswold's breaking of all the criminal precedents by staying on in Wahaska after he had been warned. For Broffin made no doubt that the warning had been given, either by Miss Farnham or by Miss Grierson—or both.

"All the same, he'll make a miss-go, sooner or later," the pertinacious one was saying to himself as he strolled past the Raymer plant with a keen eye for the barred gates, the lounging guards in the yard, and the sober-faced workmen coming and going at the pay-office. "If he can carry a steady head through what's comin' to him here, he's a better man than I've been stacking him up to be."

Coming even with the grouping around the office door, Broffin sat down on a discarded cylinder casting, chewed his dry smoke, whittled a stick, and kept an open ear for the sidewalk talk. It was angrily vindictive for the greater part, with the new member of the Raymer company for a target. Now and then it was threatening. If the company should attempt to bring in foreign labor there would be blood on the moon.

Later, a big, red-faced man with his hat on the back of his head and a paste diamond in his shirt bosom, came to join the shifting group on the office sidewalk. Broffin marked him as one of the inflammatory speakers he had seen and heard on the dry-goods-box rostrum in front of McGuire's, and had since been trying to place. The nearer

view turned up the proper page in the mental notebook. The man's name was Clancy; he was a Chicago ward-worker, sham labor leader, demagogue; a bad man with a "pull." Broffin remembered the "pull" because it had once got in his way when he was trying to bag Clancy for a violation of the revenue laws.

Instantly the detective began to speculate upon the chance that had brought the Chicago ward bully into a village labor fight, and since it was his business to put two and two together, he was not long in finding the answer to his own query. Clancy had come because he had been hired to come. Assuming this much, the remainder was easy. The town gossips had supplied all the major facts of the Raymer-Grierson checkmate, and Broffin saw a great light. It was not labor and capital that were at odds; it was competition and monopoly. And monopoly, invoking the aid of the Clancys, stood to win in a canter.

Broffin dropped the stick he had been whittling and got up to move away. Though some imaginative persons would have it otherwise, a detective may still be a man of like passions—and generous prepossessions—with other men. For the time Broffin's Anglo-Saxon heritage, the love of fair play, made him forget the limitations of his trade. "By grapples, the old swine!" he was muttering to himself as he made a slow circuit of the plant enclosure. "Somebody ought to tell them two young ducks what they're up against. For a picayune, I'd do it,

myself. Huh!—and the little black-eyed girl playin' fast an' loose with both of 'em at once while the old money-octippus eats 'em alive!"

Thus Broffin, circling the Raymer works by way of the four enclosing streets; and when his back was turned the man called Clancy pointed him out to the group of discontents.

"D'ye see that felly doublin' the fence corner? Ye're a fine lot of jays up here in th' backwoods! Do I know him? Full well I do! An' that shows ye what honest workin'men has got to come to, these days. Didn't ye see him sittin' there on that castin'? Th' bosses put him there to keep tricks on ye. If ye have the nerve of a bunch of hoboes, ye'll watch yer chances and step on him like a cockroach. He's a Pinkerton!"

XXXII

THE LION'S SHARE

WAHASKA, microcosmic and village-conscious in spite of its city charter, was duly thrilled and excited when, on the day following the storm and shipwreck, it found itself the scene of an angry conflict between capital and labor.

Reports varied as to the origin of the trouble. Among the retired farmers, who still called Raymer "Eddie" and spoke of him as "John Raymer's boy," it was the generally expressed opinion that he was both too young and too easy-going to be a successful industry captain in the larger field he had lately entered. In the workingmen's quarter, which lay principally beyond the railroad tracks, public opinion was less lenient and the young ironmaster, figuring hitherto only as a good boss with a few unnecessary college ideas, was denounced as a "kid-glove" reformer who made his profit-sharing fad an excuse for advancing his favorites, and who was accordingly to be "brought to time" by the strong hand of the organization.

It was a crude surprise, both to the West Side and to "Pottery Flat," to find the new book-writing partner not only taking an active part in the fight,

but apparently directing the capitalistic hostilities with a high hand. Quite early in the forenoon it was known on the street that Griswold had taken the field with Raymer; that the lock-out was his reply to the strike notice; and that it was at his suggestion that a dozen deputies had been sworn in to guard the Raymer plant—the iron works lying just outside of the corporation lines. A little later came the news that he had sent a counter ultimatum to the representatives of the labor forces sitting in permanence in their hall over McGuire's saloon. From two o'clock until five the offices of the plant would be open, and all former employees would be paid in full and discharged. Those who failed to make application between the hours named would not be taken back on any terms.

From two to five in the afternoon Wahaska, figuratively speaking, held its breath. At half-past three, young Dahlgren, of the *Daily Wahaskan*, spoiled a good story for his own paper by spreading the report that most of the men had sullenly drawn their pay, but as yet not a man of them had signed on for further employment. At four o'clock the *Daily Wahaskan's* windows bore a bulletin to the effect that a mass indignation meeting was in progress in front of the Pottery Flat saloon; and at half-past four it was whispered about that war had been declared. Raymer and Griswold were telegraphing for strike-breakers; and the men were swearing that the plant would be picketed and that scabs would be dealt with as traitors and enemies.

It was between half-past four and five that Miss Grierson, driving in the basket phaeton, made her appearance on the streets, evoking the usual ripple of comment among the gossipers on the Winnebago porch as she tooled her clean-limbed little Morgan to a stop in front of the Farmers' and Merchants' Bank.

Since it was long past the closing hours, the curtains were drawn in the bank doors and street-facing windows. But there was a side entrance, and when she tapped on the glass of the door an obsequious janitor made haste to admit her. "Yo' paw's busy, right now, Miss Mahg'ry," the negro said; but she ignored the hint and went straight to the door of the private room, entering without warning.

As the janitor had intimated, her father was not alone. In the chair at the desk-end sat a man florid of face, hard-eyed and gross-bodied. His hat was on the back of his head, and clamped between his teeth under the bristling mustaches he held one of Jasper Grierson's fat black cigars. The conference paused when the door opened; but when Margery crossed the room and perched herself on the deep seat of the farthest window, it went on in guarded tones at a silent signal from the banker to his visitor.

There was a trade journal lying in the window-seat, and Miss Grierson took it up to become idly immersed in a study of the advertising pictures. If she listened to the low-toned talk it was only mechanically, one would say. Yet there was a quickening of the breath now and again, and a pressing of

the white teeth upon the ripe lower lip, as she turned the pages of the advertising supplement; these, though only detached sentences of the talk drifted across to her window-seat.

"You're fixed to put the entire responsibility for the ruction over onto the other side of the house?" was one of the overheard sentences: it was her father's query, and she also heard the answer. "We're goin' to put 'em in bad, don't you forget it. There'll be some broken heads, most likely, and if they're ours, somebody'll pay for 'em." A little farther along it was her father who said: "You've got to quit this running to me. Keep to your own side of the fence. Murray's got his orders, and he'll pay the bills. If anything breaks loose, I won't know you. Get that?" "I'm on," said the red-faced man; and shortly afterward he took his leave.

When the door had closed behind the man who looked like a ward heeler or a walking delegate, and who had been both, and many other and more questionable things, by turns, Jasper Grierson swung his huge chair to face the window.

"Well?" he said, "how's Galbraith coming along?"

"There is no change," was the sober rejoinder. "He is still lying in a half-stupor, just as he was last night and this morning. Doctor Farnham shakes his head and won't say anything."

"You mustn't let him die," warned the man in the big chair, half jocularly. "There's too much money in him."

The smouldering fires in the daughter's eyes leaped up at the provocation lurking in the grim brutality; but they were dying down again when she put the trade journal aside and said: "I didn't come here to tell you about Mr. Galbraith. I came to give you notice that it is time to quit."

"Time to quit what?"

"You know. When I asked you to put Mr. Raymer under obligations to you, I said I'd tell you when it was time to stop."

Jasper Grierson sat back in his chair and chuckled.

"Lord love you!" he said, "I'd clean forgot that you had a tea-party stake in that game, Madgie; I had, for a fact!"

"Well, it is time to remember it," was the cool reply.

"What was I to remember?"

"That you were to turn around and help him out of his trouble when I gave you the word."

The president of the Farmers' and Merchants' tilted his chair to the lounging angle and laughed; a slow gurgling laugh that spread from lip to eye and thence abroad through his great frame until he shook like a grotesque incarnation of the god of mirth.

"I was to turn around and help him out of the hole, was I? Oh, no; I guess not," he denied. "It's business now, little girl, and the tea-fights are barred. I'll give you a check for that span o' blacks you were looking at, and we'll call it square."

"Does that mean that you intend to go on until

you have smashed him?" she asked, quietly ignoring the putative bribe.

"I'm going to put him out of business—him and that other fool friend of yours—if that's what you mean."

Again the sudden lightning glowed in Margery Grierson's eyes, but, as before, the flash was only momentary. There was passion enough in blood and brain, but there was also a will, and the will was the stronger.

"Please!" she besought him.

"Please what?"

"Please ruin somebody else, and let Mr.——let these two go!"

Grierson's laugh this time was brutally sardonic.

"So you're caught at last, are you, girlie? I was wondering if you wouldn't come out o' that pool with the hook in your mouth. But you might as well pull loose, even if it does hurt a little. Raymer and Griswold have got to come under."

She looked across at him steadily and again there was a struggle, short and sharp, between the leaping passions and the indomitable will. Yet she could speak softly.

"That is your last word, is it?"

"You can call it that, if you like: yes."

"What is the reason? Why do you hate these two so desperately?" she asked.

Jasper Grierson fanned away the nimbus of cigar smoke with which he had surrounded himself and stared gloomily at her through the rift.

"Who said anything about hating?" he derided. "That's a fool woman's notion. This is business, and there ain't any such thing as hate in business. Raymer's iron-shop happens to be in the road of a bigger thing, and it's got to move out; that's all."

She nodded slowly. "I thought so," she said, half-absently: "and the 'bigger thing' has some more money in it for you. Oh, how I do despise it all!"

"Oh, no, you don't," he contradicted, falling back into the half-jocular vein. "You're a pretty good spender, yourself, Madgie. If you didn't have plenty of money to eat and drink and wear and breathe——"

"I hate it!" she said coldly. Then she dragged the talk back to the channel it was leaving. "I ought to have broken in sooner; I might have known what you would do. You are responsible for this labor trouble they are having over at the iron works. Don't bother to deny it; I know. That was your 'heeler'—the man you had here when I came. You don't play fair with many people: don't you think you'd better make an exception of me?"

Grierson was mouthing his cigar again and the smoky nimbus was thickening to its customary density when he said: "You're nothing but a spoiled baby, Madge. If you'd cry for the moon, you'd think you ought to have it. I've said my say, and that's all there is to it. Trot along home and 'tend to your tea-parties: that's your part of the game. I can play my hand alone."

She slipped out of the window-seat and crossed the room quickly to stand before him.

"I'll go, when you have answered one question," she said, the suppressed passions finding their way into her voice. "I've asked for bread and you've given me a stone. I've said 'please' to you, and you slapped me for it. Do you think you can afford to shove me over to the other side?"

"I don't know what you're driving at, now," was the even-toned rejoinder.

"Don't you? Then I'll tell you. You have been pinching this town for the lion's share ever since we came here—shaking it down as you used to shake down the"—she broke off short, and again the indomitable will got the better of the seething passions. "We'll let the by-gones go, and come down to the present. What if some of the things you are doing here and now should get into print?"

"For instance?" he suggested, when she paused.

"This Raymer affair, for one thing. You don't own the *Wahaskan*—yet: supposing it should come out to-morrow morning with the true story of this disgraceful piece of buccaneering, telling how you tried first to squeeze him through the bank loan, and when that failed, how you bribed his workmen to make trouble?"

"You go to Randolph and try it," said the gray wolf, jeeringly. "In the first place, he wouldn't believe it—coming from you. He wouldn't forget that you're my daughter, however much you are

trying to forget it. In the next place he'd want proof—damned good proof—if he was going to make a fight on me. He'd know that one of two things would happen; if he failed to get me, I'd get him."

The daughter who had asked for bread and had been given a stone put her face in her hands and moved toward the door. But at the last moment she turned again like a spiteful little tiger-cat at bay.

"You think I can't prove it? That is where you fall down. I can convince Mr. Randolph if I choose to try. And that isn't all: I can tell him how you have planned to sell Mr. Galbraith a tract of 'virgin' pine that has been culled over for the best timber at least three times in the past five years!"

Jasper Grierson started from his chair and made a quick clutch into smoky space. "Madge—you little devil!" he gritted.

But the grasping hands closed upon nothing, and the sound of the closing door was his only answer.

When she had unhitched the little Morgan and had driven away from the bank, Miss Grierson did a thing unprecedented in any of her former grapplings with a crisis—she hesitated. Twice she drove down Sioux Avenue with the apparent intention of stopping at the *Daily Wahaskan* building, and twice she went on past with no more than an irresolute glance for the upper windows beyond which lay the editorial rooms and the office of Mr. Carter

Randolph, the owner of the newspaper. But on the third circuit of the square, decision had evidently come to its own again. Turning the mare into Main Street, she drove quickly to the Winnebago House and drew up at the carriage step. A bell-boy ran out to hold the horse, but she shook her head and called him to the wheel of the phaeton to slip a coin into his hand and to give him a brief message.

Two minutes after the boy's disappearance, Broffin came out and touched his hat to the trim little person in the basket seat.

"You wanted to see me, Miss Grierson?" he said, shelving his surprise, if he had any.

"Yes. You are Mr. Matthew Broffin, of the Colburne Detective Agency, are you not?" she asked, sweetly.

Broffin took the privilege of the accused and lied promptly.

"Not that anybody ever heard of, I reckon," he denied, matching the smile in the inquiring eyes.

"How curious!" she commented.

Broffin's smile became a grin of triumph. "There's a heap o' curious things in this little old world," he volunteered. "What?"

"But none quite so singular as this," she averred. Then she laughed softly. "You see, it resolves itself into a question of veracity—between you and Mr. Andrew Galbraith. You say you are not, and he says you are. Which am I to believe?"

Broffin did some pretty swift thinking. There had

been times when he had fancied that Miss Grierson, rather than Miss Farnham, might be the key to his problem. There was one chance in a thousand that she might inadvertently put the key into his hands if he should play his cards skilfully, and he took the chance.

"You can call it a mistake of mine, if you like," he yielded; and she nodded brightly.

"That is better; now we can go on comfortably. Are you too busy to take a little commission from me?"

"Maybe not. What is it?" He was looking for a trap, and would not commit himself too broadly.

"There are two things that I wish to know definitely. Of course, you have heard about the accident on the lake? Mr. Galbraith is at our house, and he is very ill—out of his head most of the time. He is continually trying to tell some one whom he calls 'MacFarland' to be careful. Do you know any one of that name?"

Broffin put a foot on the phaeton step and a hand on the dash. There were loungers on the hotel porch and it was not necessary for them to hear.

"Yes; MacFarland is his confidential man in the bank," he returned.

"Oh; that explains it. But what is it that Mr. Galbraith wants him to be careful about?"

Again Broffin thought quickly. If he should tell the plain truth. . . . "Tell me one thing, Miss Grierson," he said bluntly. "Am I doin' business with you, or with your father?"

"Most emphatically, with me, Mr. Broffin."

"All right; everything goes, then. Mr. Galbraith has been figurin' on buying some pine lands up north."

"I know that much. Go on."

"And he has sent MacFarland up to verify the boundary records on the county survey."

"To Duluth?"

Broffin nodded.

"I thought so," she affirmed. And then: "The records are all right, Mr. Broffin; but the lands which Mr. MacFarland will be shown will not be the lands which Mr. Galbraith is talking of buying. I want evidence of this—in black and white. Can you telegraph to some one in Duluth?"

Broffin permitted himself a small sigh of relief. He thought he had seen the trap; that she was going to try to get him away from Wahaska.

"I can do better than that," he offered. "I can send a man from St. Paul; a good safe man who will do just what he is told to do—and keep his mouth shut."

She nodded approvingly.

"Do it; and tell your messenger that time is precious and expense doesn't count. That is the first half of your commission. Come a little closer and I'll tell you the second half."

Broffin bent his head and she whispered the remainder of his instructions. When she had finished he looked up and wagged his head apprehendingly.

"Yes; I see what you mean—and it's none o'

my business what you mean it for," he answered. "I'll get the evidence, if there is any."

"It must be like the other; in black and white," she stipulated. "And you needn't say 'if.' Look for a red-faced man with stiff mustaches and a big make-believe diamond in his shirt-front, and make him tell you."

Broffin wagged his head again. "There ain't goin' to be any grand jury business about it, is there?" he questioned; adding: "I know your man—saw him this afternoon over at the plant. He's goin' to be a tough customer to handle unless I can tell him there ain't goin' to be any come-back in the courts."

Miss Grierson was opening her purse and she passed a yellow-backed bank-note to her newest confederate.

"Your retainer," she explained. "And about the red-faced man: we sha'n't take him into court. But I'd rather you wouldn't buy him, if you can help it. Can't you get him like this, some way?" —she held up a thumb and finger tightly pressed together.

Broffin's grin this time was wholly of appreciation.

"You're the right kind—the kind that leads trumps all the while, Miss Grierson," he told her. Then he did the manly thing. "I'll go into this, just as you say—what? But it's only fair to warn you that it may turn up some things that'll feaze you. You know that old sayin' about sleepin' dogs?"

Miss Grierson was gathering the reins over the little Morgan's back and her black eyes snapped.

"This is one time when we are going to kick the dogs and make them wake up," she returned. "Good-by, Mr. Broffin."

XXXIII

GATES OF BRASS

It was an hour beyond the normal quitting time on the day of ultimatums and counter-threatenings, the small office force had gone home, and the night squad of deputies had come to relieve the day guard. Griswold closed the spare desk in the manager's room and twirled his chair to face Raymer.

"We may as well go and get something to eat," he suggested. "There will be nothing doing to-night."

Raymer began to put his desk in order.

"No, not to-night. The trouble will begin when we try to start up with a new force. Call it a weakness if you like, but I dread it, Kenneth."

Griswold's smile was a mere baring of the teeth. "That's all right, Ned; you do the dreading and I'll do the fighting," he said; adding: "What we've had to-day has merely whetted my appetite."

The man of peace shook his head dejectedly.

"I can't understand it," he protested. "Up to last night I was calling you a benevolent Socialist, and my only fear was that you might some time want to reorganize things and turn the plant into a little section of Utopia. Now you are out-heroding Herod on the other side."

Griswold got up and crushed his soft hat upon his head.

"Only fools and dead folk are denied the privilege of changing their minds," he returned. "Let's go up to the Winnebago and feed."

The dinner to which they sat down a little later was a small feast of silence. Each was busy with his own thoughts, and it was not until after the coffee had been served that Griswold leaned across the table to call Raymer's attention to a man who was finishing his meal in a distant corner of the dining-room, a swarthy-faced man who drank his coffee with the meat course to the unpleasant detriment of a pair of long drooping mustaches.

"Wait a minute before you look around, and then tell me who that fellow is over on the right—the man with the black mustaches," he directed.

Raymer looked and shook his head.

"He's a new-comer—comparatively; somebody at the club said he gave himself out for a lumberman from Louisiana."

Griswold was nodding slowly. "His name?" he asked.

"I can't remember. It's an odd name; Boffin, or Giffin, or something like that. They're beginning to say now that he isn't a lumberman at all—just why, I don't know."

Griswold's right hand stole softly to his hip pocket. The touch was reassuring. But a little while after, when he was leaving the dining-room with Raymer, he dropped behind and made a quick transfer of some-

thing from the hip pocket to the side pocket of his coat. His hand was still in the coat pocket when he parted from the young iron-founder on the sidewalk.

"You'll be going home, I suppose?" he said.

Raymer made a wry face.

"Yes; and I wish to gracious you were the one who had to face my mother and sister. They're all for peace, you know—peace at any old price."

Griswold laughed.

"Tell them we're going to have peace if we are obliged to fight for it. And don't let them swing you. If we back down now we may as well go into court and ask for a receiver. Good-night."

Though he had not betrayed it, Griswold was fiercely impatient to get away. One tremendous question had been dominating all others from the earliest moment of the morning awakening, and all day long it had fed upon doubtings and uncertainty. Would Andrew Galbraith recover from the effects of the drowning accident? At first, he thought he would go to his room and telephone to Margery. But before he had reached the foot of Shawnee Street he had changed his mind. What he wanted to say could scarcely be trusted to the wires.

Twice before he reached the gate of the Grierson lawn he fancied he was followed, and twice he stepped behind the nearest shade-tree and tightened his grip upon the thing in his right-hand pocket. But both times the rearward sidewalk showed itself empty. Since false alarms may have, for the moment, all the shock of the real, he found that his hands were trem-

bling when he came to unlatch the Grierson gate, and it made him vindictively self-scornful. Also, it gave him a momentary glimpse into another and hitherto unmeasured depth in the valley of stumblings. In the passing of the glimpse he was made to realize that it is the coward who kills; and kills because he is a coward.

He had traversed the stone-flagged approach and climbed the steps of the broad veranda to reach for the bell-push when he heard his name called softly in the voice that he had come to know in all of its many modulations. The call came from the depths of one of the great wicker lounging-chairs half-hidden in the veranda shadows. In a moment he had placed another of the chairs for himself, dropping into it wearily.

"How did you know it was I?" he asked, when he could trust himself to speak.

"I saw you at the gate," she returned. "Are you just up from the Iron Works?"

"I have been to dinner since we came up-town—Raymer and I."

A pause, and then: "The men are still holding out?"

"We are holding out. The plant is closed, and it will stay closed until we can get another force of workmen."

"There will be lots of suffering," she ventured.

"Inevitably. But they have brought it upon themselves."

"Not the ones who will suffer the most—the women and children," she corrected.

"It's no use," he said, answering her thought. "There is nothing in me to appeal to."

"There was yesterday, or the day before," she suggested.

"Perhaps. But yesterday was yesterday, and to-day is to-day. As I told Raymer a little while ago, I've changed my mind."

"About the rights of the down-trodden?"

"About all things under the sun."

"No," she denied, "you only think you have. But you didn't come here to tell me that?"

"No; I came to ask a single question. How is Mr. Galbraith?"

"He is a very sick man."

Another pause, for which the questioner was responsible.

"You mean that there is a chance that he may not recover?"

"More than a chance, I'm afraid. The first thing Doctor Bertie did yesterday evening was to wire St. Paul for two trained nurses; and to-day he telegraphed Chicago for Doctor Holworthy, who charges twenty-five dollars a minute for mere office consultations."

"Humph!" said Griswold, "money needn't cut any figure." And then, after a moment of silence: "I did my best; you know I did my best?"

Her answer puzzled him a little.

"I could almost find it in my heart to hate you if you hadn't."

"But you know I did."

"Yes; I know you did."

Silence again, broken only by the whispering of the summer night breeze rustling the leaves of the lawn oaks and the lapping of tiny waves on the lake beach. At the end of it, Griswold got up and groped for his hat.

"I'm going home," he said. "It has been a pretty strenuous day, and there is another one coming. But before I go I want you to promise me one thing. Will you let me know immediately, by 'phone or messenger, if Mr. Galbraith takes a turn for the better?"

"Certainly," she said; and she let him say good-night and get as far as the steps before she called him back.

"There was another thing," she began, with the sober gravity that he could never be sure was not one of her many poses, and not the least alluring one. "Do you believe in God, Kenneth?"

The query took him altogether by surprise, but he made shift to answer it with becoming seriousness.

"I suppose I do. Why?"

"It is a time to pray to Him," she said softly; "to pray very earnestly that Mr. Galbraith's life may be spared."

He could not let that stand.

"Why should I concern myself, specially?" he asked; adding: "Of course, I'm sorry, and all that, but——"

"Never mind," she interposed, and she left her chair to walk beside him to the steps. "I've had a hard day, too, Kenneth, boy, and I—I guess it has

got on my nerves. But, all the same, you ought to do it, you know."

He stopped and looked down into the eyes whose depths he could never wholly fathom.

"Why don't you do it?" he demanded.

"I? oh, God doesn't know me; and, besides, I thought—oh, well, it doesn't matter what I thought. Good-night."

And before he could return the leave-taking word, she was gone.

XXXIV

THE ABYSS

RAYMER'S prediction that the real trouble would begin when the attempt should be made to start the plant with imported workmen was amply fulfilled during the militant week which followed the opening of hostilities.

The appearance of the first detachment of strike-breakers, a trampish crew gathered up hastily by the employment agencies in the cities in response to Griswold's telegrams, was the signal for active resistance. Promptly the Iron Works plant and the approaches to it were picketed, and of the twenty-five or thirty men who came in on the first day's train only a badly frightened and cowed half-dozen won through the persuading, jeering, threatening picket line to the offices of the plant.

Other days followed in which the scenes of the first were repeated—with the difference that each succeeding day saw the inevitable increase of lawlessness. From taunts and abuse the insurrectionaries passed easily to violence. Street fights, when the trampish place-takers came in any considerable numbers, were of daily occurrence, and the tale of the wounded grew like the returns from a battle. By the middle of the week Raymer and Griswold were asking

for a sheriff's posse to maintain peace in the neighborhood of the plant; and were getting their first definite hint that some one higher up was playing the game of politics against them.

"No, gentlemen; I've done all that the law requires and a little more," was the sheriff's response to the plea for better protection. Then came the hint. "You can take it as a word from a friend that this private scrap of yours with your men is making everybody pretty tired. First and last, it's only a question of whether you'll pay out a little more money, or a little less money, not to a lot of imported hoboes, but to certain citizens of Red Earth County,"—to which was added significantly—"citizens with votes."

"In other words, Mr. Bradford, you've got your orders from the men higher up, have you?" rasped Griswold, who was by this time lost to all sense of expediency.

"I don't have to reply to any such charge as that," said the chief peace officer, turning back to his desk; and so the brittle little conference ended.

"All of which means that we shall lose the plant guard of deputies that Bradford has been maintaining," commented Raymer, as they were descending the Court House stairs; and again his prediction came true. Later in the day the guard was withdrawn; and Griswold, savagely reluctant, was forced to make a concession repeatedly urged and argued for by the older men among the strikers, namely, that the guarding of the company's property be entrusted to a picked squad of the ex-employees themselves.

During these days of turmoil and rioting the transformed idealist passed through many stages of the journey down a certain dark and mephitic valley not of amelioration. With the bitter industrial conflict to feed it, a slow fire within him ate its way into all the foundations, and as the fair superstructure of character settled, the moral perpendiculars and planes of projection became more and more distorted. Fairness was gone, and in its place stood angry resentment, ready to rend and tear. Pity and ruth were going: the daily report from Margery told of the lessening chance of life for Andrew Galbraith, and the stirrings evoked were neither regretful nor compassionate. On the contrary, he knew very well that the news of Galbraith's death would be a relief for which, in his heart of hearts, he was secretly thirsting.

It was at the close of the week of tumult that the dreadful beckoning came. One of the two trained nurses installed at Mereside had been called away to the bedside of a sick father. Another had been wired for immediately, but between the going and the coming a night would intervene. So much Griswold got from Margery over the Iron Works telephone late in the afternoon of a day thickly besprinkled with the sidewalk waylayings and riotings. When he reached his Shawnee Street lodgings at nine o'clock that night he found Miss Grierson's phaeton standing at the curb.

"Get in," she said, briefly, making room for him in the basket seat. And when the mare had been

given the word to go: "I hope you are not too tired to chaperon me. I've got to drive over to the college infirmary. We simply *must* have another nurse for to-night."

He denied the weariness—most untruthfully—and after that, she made him talk all the way across town to the college campus; compelled him, and found him absently irresponsive. Oh, yes; the fight was still going on: No, they would never give in to the demands of the strikers: Yes, he had seen Miss Farnham twice since the trouble began; she was frankly agreed with Raymer's mother and sister; they all wanted peace, and they were all against him. She led him on, and meanwhile they encountered one failure after another in the nurse-hunting. The town clock was striking the quarter-past ten when Miss Grierson confessed that she had exhausted the list of possibilities.

"I must go back at once," she declared. "Miss Davidson—the day nurse—has been on duty constantly since six this morning, and I'm not going to let her kill herself."

"But you haven't been able to find anybody. Who will relieve her?"

Then came the thunderbolt—and beyond it the beckoning. "You and I will," she said calmly. And then, as if to forestall the possible refusal: "It is merely to sit in the next room and to go in and give him his medicine at half-hour intervals. Either of us can do that much for a poor old man who is making his last stand in the fight for his life."

Three days earlier, nay, one day earlier, Griswold might have recoiled in horror from the suggestion that thrust itself into heart and brain. But now he merely pushed the unspeakable prompting into the background. Of course, he would go; and, equally of course, he would share the night watch with her. One question he permitted himself, and it was not asked until after they had reached the darkened mansion on the lake's edge and were mounting the stair to the sick-room. Was Mr. Galbraith conscious? Could he recognize any one?

"No," was the low-voiced response; and presently they had reached the outer room of shaded lights, and the sleepy day nurse had been released, and Margery was explaining the medicines to her watch sharer.

It was a simple matter, as she had said; the medicine from the larger bottle was to be given in teaspoonful doses on the even hour, and that in the smaller, ten drops in a little water, on the alternating half-hours.

"It's his heart chiefly, now," she explained, "and this drop-medicine is for that. If you should forget to give it—but I know you won't forget. There are books in the hall case, and you can sit in here and read. When you are tired, come and tap at the door of my room and I'll take what you leave."

While she was speaking the softly chiming clock in the lower hall struck the half-hour. "I'll help you give him the first dose," she went on; and he stood by and watched her as she dropped the heart-

stimulant into a spoon and diluted it with a little water. "Come," she said; and they went together into the adjoining room.

Griswold had been hardening himself deliberately to look unmoved upon what the shaded electric night-light in the farther room should reveal: it was nothing more terrible than the sight of a drawn face, half-hidden in the pillows; a face in which life and death still fought for the mastery as they had fought on that other day when life, unhelped, would have been the loser.

The small service was quickly rendered. Griswold lifted the sick man, and his companion, deft and steady-handed, administered the stimulant.

"Ten drops; no more and no less; exactly on the half-hour: those are Doctor Bertie's orders," she said, when they had withdrawn to the outer room. And then: "Good-night, for a little while. Don't hesitate to call me when you've had enough."

For so long as he could distinguish her light step in the corridor, Griswold stood motionless as she had left him. Then he flung himself into the nearest chair and covered his face with his hands.

. . . . . .

The quarter-hour passed, and after the three mellow strokes had died away the silence grew slowly maddening. When inaction was no longer bearable, Griswold sprang up and went to stand at the open window. The summer night was hot and breathless. In the north-west a storm cloud was creeping up into the sky, and he watched its black

shadow climbing like a terrifying threat of doom out of the illimitable and blotting out the stars one by one. . . . "For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain. . . ." Out of a childhood which seemed very far away and unreal the words of the Psalmist came to ring in his ears like the muffled tolling of a passing-bell. So it must be soon for all the living; and whether a little sooner or a little later, what could it matter? A breath more or less to be drawn; a longer or shorter fluttering of the feeble heart; that was all.

The clock struck eleven, and mechanically he poured out the dose from the larger bottle and gave it to the sick man. When it was done he left the bedside and the inner room quickly and went back to the open window. The air was thick and stifling, and when he sat down in the deep window-seat he was gasping for breath. It was going to be harder than he had thought it would, though now that the time had come he realized that he had been subconsciously planning for it, preparing for it. And the means which had been thrust into his hands could scarcely have been simpler. He had only to sit still and do nothing—and no one would ever know. He took up the small phial and held it to the light: ten drops, or forty drops; they would neither be missed, nor counted if they should remain.

The single chiming stroke of the quarter-past struck while he was putting the bottle down, and he started as if the mellow cadence had been a pistol shot. For fifteen minutes longer he could live and

breathe and be as other men are; and after that. . . . He saw himself looking back upon the normal world from the new view-point, as he fancied Cain might have looked back after the mark had been set upon his brow. Would it really make the hideous, monstrous difference that all men seemed to think it did? He would know, presently, when the revocable should have become the irrevocable. He heard the sick man stir feebly, and then the sound of his slow, labored breathing made itself felt, rather than heard, in the crushing, stifling silence. How the minutes dragged! He leaned his head against the window jamb and closed his eyes, striving fiercely to drive forth the thronging thoughts; to make his mind a blank. Gradually the effort succeeded. He was conscious of a dull, throbbing, soothing pulse beating slow measures in his temples, and a curious roaring as of distant cataracts in his ears; and after that, nothing.

. . . . . .

A tempestuous thunder shower was lashing the trees on the lawn when he awoke with a start and found Margery bending over him to close the window. With every nerve a needle to prick him alive he dragged out his watch. It was a quarter-past two. Miserably, wretchedly he pulled himself together and stood up to face her, putting his hands on her shoulders to make her look up at him.

"Margery, girl; do you know what I have done?—Oh, my God! I am a murderer—a murderer at last!"

She turned her face away quickly.

"Oh, no, no, boy!—not meaning to be!" she murmured.

"What is the difference?" he demanded harshly. And then: "God knows—He knows whether I meant it or not."

She looked up again, and, as once or twice before in his knowing of her, he saw the dark eyes swimming.

"It was too hard; I shouldn't have asked it of you, Kenneth. I knew what a cruel strain you've been under all these bad days. And there was no harm done. I—I have been here a long time—ever since half-past eleven; and I've been giving Mr. Galbraith his medicine. Now go down-stairs and stretch out on the hall lounge. I'll run down and send you home as soon as it stops raining."

XXXV

MARGERY'S ANSWER

"WELL, it has come at last," said Raymer, passing a newly opened letter of the morning delivery over to Griswold. "The railroad people are taking their work away from us. I've been looking for that in every mail."

Griswold glanced at the letter and handed it back. The burden of the night of horrors was still lying heavily upon him, and his only comment was a questioning, "Well?"

"I've been thinking," was the reply. "I know Atherton, the new president of the Pineboro, pretty well; suppose I should run over to St. Paul and see him—make it a personal plea. We have enough of the hoboes now to run half-gangs; and perhaps, if I could make Atherton believe that we are going to win——"

"You couldn't," Griswold interrupted, shortly. "And, besides, you have told me yourself that Atherton is only a figurehead. Grierson's the man."

At this, Raymer let go again.

"What's the use?" he said dejectedly. "We're down, and everything we do merely prolongs the agony. Do you know that they tried to burn the plant last night?"

"No; I hadn't heard."

"They did. It was just before the thunder storm. They had everything fixed; a pile of kindlings laid in the corner back of the machine-shop annex and the whole thing saturated with kerosene."

"Well, why didn't they do it?" queried Griswold, half-heartedly. After the heavens have fallen, no mere terrestrial cataclysm can evoke a thrill.

"That's a mystery. Something happened; just what, the watchman who had the machine-shop beat couldn't tell. He says there was a flash of light bright enough to blind him, and then a scrap of some kind. When he got out of the shop and around to the place, there was no one there; nothing but the pile of kindlings."

Griswold took up the letter from the railway people and read it again. When he faced it down on Raymer's desk, he had closed with the conclusion which had been thrusting itself upon him since the early morning hour when he had picked his way among the sidewalk pools from Mereside to upper Shawnee Street.

"You can still save yourself, Edward," he said, still with the colorless note in his voice. And he added: "You know the way."

Raymer jerked his head out of his desk and swung around in the pivot-chair.

"See here, Griswold; the less said about that at this stage of the game, the better it will be for both of us!" he exploded. "I'm going to do as I said I

should, but not until this fight is settled, one way or the other!"

Griswold did not retort in kind.

"The condition has already expired by limitation; the fight is as good as settled now," he said, placably. "We are only making a hopeless bluff. We can hold our forty or fifty tramp workmen just as long as we pay their board over in town, and don't ask them to report for work. But the day the shop whistle is blown, four out of every five will vanish. We both know that."

"Then there is nothing for it but a receivership," was Raymer's gloomy decision.

"Not without a miracle," Griswold admitted. "And the day of miracles is past."

Thus the idealist, out of a depth of wretchedness and self-exprobration hitherto unplumbed. But if he could have had even a momentary gift of telepathic vision he might have seen a miracle at that moment in the preliminary stage of its outworking.

The time was half-past nine; the place a grotto-like summer-house on the Mereside lawn. The miracle workers were two: Margery Grierson, radiant in the daintiest of morning house-gowns, and the man who had taken her retainer. Miss Grierson was curiously examining a photographic print: the pictured scene was a well-littered foundry yard with buildings forming an angle in the near background. Against the buildings a pile of shavings with kindlings showed quite clearly; and, stooping to ignite the pile, was a man who had evidently looked up

at, or just before, the instant of camera-snapping. There was no mistaking the identity of the man. He had a round, pig-jowl face; his bristling mustaches stood out stiffly as if in sudden horror; and his hat was on the back of his head.

"It ain't very good," Broffin apologized. "The sun ain't high enough yet to make a clear print. But you said 'hurry,' and I reckon it will do."

Miss Grierson nodded. "You caught him in the very act, didn't you?" she said coolly. "What did he do?"

"Dropped things and jumped for the camera. But the flash had blinded him, and, besides, the camera had been moved. I let him have a foot to fall over, and he took it; after which I made a bluff at tryin' to hold him. Lordy gracious! new ropes wouldn't 'a' held him, then. I'll bet he's runnin' yet—what?"

"What did he hope to accomplish by setting fire to the works?"

"It was a frame-up to capture public sympathy. There's been a report circulating 'round that Raymer and Griswold was goin' to put some o' the ringleaders in jail, if they had to *make* a case against 'em. Clancy had it figured out that the fire'd be charged up to the owners, themselves."

Miss Grierson was still examining the picture. "You made two of these prints?" she asked.

"Yes; here's the other one—and the film."

"And you have the papers to make them effective?"

Broffin handed her a large envelope, unsealed. "You'll find 'em in there. That part of it was a cinch. Your governor ought to fire that man Murray. He was payin' Clancy in checks!"

Again Miss Grierson nodded.

"About the other matter?" she inquired. "Have you heard from your messenger?"

Broffin produced another envelope. It had been through the mails and bore the Duluth postmark.

"Affidavits was the best we could do there," he said. "My man worked it to go with MacFarland as the driver of the rig. They saw some mighty fine timber, but it happened to be on the wrong side of the St. Louis County line. He's a tolerably careful man, and he verified the landmarks."

"Affidavits will do," was the even-toned rejoinder. Then: "These papers are all in duplicate?"

"Everything in pairs—just as you ordered."

Miss Grierson took an embroidered chamois-skin money-book from her bosom and began to open it. Broffin raised his hand.

"Not any more," he objected. "You overpaid me that first evening in front of the Winnebago."

"You needn't hesitate," she urged. "It's my own money."

"I've had a-plenty."

"Enough so that we can call it square?"

"Yes, and more than enough."

"Then I can only thank you," she said, rising.

He knew that he was being dismissed, but the one chance in a thousand had yet to be tested.

"Just a minute, Miss Grierson," he begged. "I've done you right in this business, haven't I?"

"You have."

"I said I didn't want any more money, and I don't. But there's one other thing. Do you know what I'm here in this little jay town of yours for?"

"Yes; I have known it for a long time."

"I thought so. You knew it that day out at the De Soto, when you was tellin' Mr. Raymer a little story that was partly true and partly made up—what?"

"And when you were sitting behind the window curtains listening," she laughed. "Yes; I knew it then. What about it?"

"I've been wonderin' as I set here, if there was anything on the top side of God's green earth that'd persuade you to tell me how much o' that story was made up."

She was smiling deliciously when she said: "You are from the South, Mr. Broffin, and I didn't suppose a Southerner could be so unchivalrous as to suspect a lady of fibbing."

He shook his head. "I wish you'd tell me, Miss Grierson. I'm in pretty bad on this thing, and if——"

"I can tell you what to do, if that will help you."

"It might," he allowed.

"Go away and take some other commission. It's a cold trail, Mr. Broffin."

"But you won't say that Griswold isn't the man?"

"It is not for me to say. But Miss Farnham says he isn't, and Mr. Galbraith—you tried him, didn't you? What more do you want?"

"I want *you* to say he isn't; then I'll go away."

"You may put me in jail for contempt of court, if you like," she jested. "I refuse to testify. But I will tell you what you asked to know—if that will do any good. Every word of the story about Mr. Griswold—the story that you overheard, you know—was true; every single word of it. Do you suppose I should have dared to embroider it the least little bit—with you sitting right there at my back?"

"But you did think for a while that he might be the man—what?"

"Yes; I did think so—for a while."

Broffin got up and took a half-burned cigar from the ledge of the summer-house where he had carefully laid it at the beginning of the interview.

"You've got me down," he confessed, with a good-natured grin. "The man that plays a winnin' hand against you has got to get up before sun in the morning and hold *all* trumps, Miss Grierson—to say nothin' of being a mighty good bluffer, on the side." Then he switched suddenly. "How's Mr. Galbraith this morning?"

"He is very low, but he is conscious again. He has asked us to wire for the cashier of his bank to come up."

Broffin's eyes narrowed.

"The cashier is sick and can't come," he said.

"Well, some one in authority will come, I suppose."

Once more Broffin was thinking in terms of speed. Johnson, the paying teller, was next in rank to the cashier. If he should be the one to come to Wahaska. . . .

"If you haven't anything else for me to do, I reckon I'll be going," he said, hastily, and forthwith made his escape. The telegraph office was a good ten minutes' walk from the lake front, and in the light of what Miss Grierson had just told him, the minutes were precious.

Something less than a half-hour after Broffin's hurried departure, Miss Grierson, coated and gauntleted, came down the Mereside carriage steps to take the reins of the big trap horse from Thorsen's hands. Contrary to her usual custom, she avoided Main Street and drove around past the college grounds to come by quieter thoroughfares to the industrial district beyond the railroad tracks.

For the first time in a riotous week, Pottery Flat was outwardly peaceful and its narrow streets were practically empty. Just what this portended, Margery did not know; but she found out when she turned into the street upon which the Raymer property fronted. Smoke was pouring from the tall central stack of the plant, and it had evidently provoked a sudden and wrathful gathering of the clans. The sidewalks were filled with angry workmen, and an excited argument was going forward at one of the barred gates between the locked-out men and a watchman inside of the yard.

The crowd let the trap pass without hindrance.

However coldly Lake Boulevard and upper Shawnee Street might regard Miss Grierson, there was no enmity in the glances of the Flat dwellers—and for good reasons. In want, Miss Margery had poured largesse out of a liberal hand; and in sickness she had many times proved herself the veritable good angel that some people called her.

It was one of the strikers who offered to hold the big Englishman when the magnate's daughter sprang from the trap at the office door, and for the young fellow who offered she had a smile and a pleasant word. "I wouldn't trouble you to do that, Malcolm; but if you'll lead him along to that post and hitch him, I'll be much obliged," she said.

Though it was the first time she had been in the new offices, she seemed to know where to find what she sought; and when Raymer took his face out of his desk, she was standing on the threshold of the open door and smiling across at him.

"May I come in?" she asked; and when he fairly bubbled over in the effort to make her understand how welcome she was: "No; I mustn't sit down, because if I do, I shall stay too long—and this is a business call. Where is Mr. Griswold?"

"He went up-town a little while ago, and I wish to goodness he'd come back. You'd think, to look out of the windows, that we were due to have battle and murder and sudden death, wouldn't you? It's all because we have put a little fire under one battery of boilers. They tried to burn us out last night,

and I'm going to carry steam enough for the fire pumps, if the heavens fall."

"You have been having a great deal of trouble, haven't you?" she said, sympathetically. "I'm sorry, and I've come to help you cure it."

Raymer shook his head despondently.

"I'm afraid it has gone past the curing point," he said.

"Oh, no, it hasn't. I have discovered the remedy and I've brought it with me." She took a sealed envelope from the inside pocket of her driving-coat and laid it on the desk before him. "I'm going to ask you to lock that up in your office safe for a little while, just as it is," she went on. "If there are no signs of improvement in the sick situation by three o'clock, you are to open it—you and Mr. Griswold—and read the contents. Then you will know exactly what to do, and how to go about it."

Her lip was trembling when she got through, and he saw it.

"What have you done, Margery?" he asked gently. "If it is something that hurts you——"

"Don't!" she pleaded; "you mu-mustn't break my nerve just at the time when I'm going to need every shred of it. Do as I say, and please, *please* don't ask any questions!"

She was going then, but he got before her and shut the door and put his back against it.

"I don't know what you have done, but I can guess," he said, lost now to everything save the in-

toxicating joy of the barrier-breakers. "You have a heart of gold, Margery, and I——"

"Please don't," she said, trying to stop him; but he would not listen.

"No; before that envelope is opened, before I can possibly know what it contains, I'm going to ask you one question in spite of your prohibition; and I'm going to ask it now because, afterward, I may not—you may not—that is, perhaps it won't be possible for me to ask, or for you to listen. I love you, Margery; I——"

She was looking up at him with the faintest shadow of a smile lurking in the depths of the alluring eyes. And her lips were no longer tremulous when she said: "Oh, no, you don't; I know just how you feel; you are excited, and—and impulsive, and there's a sort of getting-ready-to-be-grateful feeling roaming around in you, and all that. If I were as mean as some people think I am, I might take advantage of all this, mightn't I? But I sha'n't. Won't you open the door and let me go? It's *very* important."

"Heavens, Margery! don't make a joke of it!" he burst out. "Can't you see that I mean it? Girl, girl, I want you—I need you!"

This time she laughed outright. Then she grew suddenly grave.

"My dear friend, you don't know what you are saying. The gate that you are trying to break down opens upon nothing but misery and wretchedness. If I loved you as a woman ought to love her

lover, for your sake and for my own I should still say no—a thousand times no! Now will you open the door and let me go?"

He turned and fumbled for the door-knob like a man in a daze.

"Don't you—don't you think you might learn to—to think of me in that way?—after a while?" he pleaded.

He had opened the door a little way, and she slipped past him. But in the corridor she turned and laughed at him again.

"I am going to cure you—you, personally, as well as the sick situation—Mr. Raymer," she said flippantly. Then, mimicking him as a spoiled child might have done: "I might possibly learn to—think of you—in that way—after a while. But I could never, never, *never* learn to love your mother and your sister."

And with that spiteful thrust she left him.

XXXVI

THE GRAY WOLF

As it chanced, Jasper Grierson was in the act of concluding a long and apparently satisfactory telephone conversation with his agent in Duluth at the moment when the door of his private room opened and his daughter entered.

As on a former occasion, she went to sit in the window until the way to free speech should be open, and she could not well help hearing the closing words of the long-distance conference.

"You sit tight in the boat; that's all you've got to do," her father was saying. "Keep the young fellow with you as long as you can; the other man is too sick to talk business, right now. When you can't hold the young one any longer, let me know. We'll play the hand out as it lays. Get that? I say, we'll play the hand out as it lays."

He had hung the receiver on its hook and was pushing the bracketted telephone-set aside when Margery crossed the room swiftly and placed an envelope, the counterpart of the one left with Raymer, on the desk.

"There is your notice to quit," she said calmly. "You threw me down and gave me the double-cross the other day, and now I've come back at you."

Another man might have hastened to meet the crisis. But the gray wolf was of a different mettle. He let the envelope lie untouched until after he had pulled out a drawer in the desk, found his box of cigars, and had leisurely selected and lighted one of the fat black monstrosities. When he tore the envelope across, the photographic print fell out, and he studied it carefully for many seconds before he read the accompanying documents. For a little time after he had tossed the papers aside there was a silence that bit. Then he said, slowly:

"So that's your raise, is it? Where does the game stand, right now?"

"You stand to lose."

Again the biting silence; and then: "You don't think I'm fool enough to give you back your ammunition so that you can use it on me, do you?"

"Those papers and that picture are copies: the originals are in a sealed envelope in Mr. Raymer's safe. If you haven't taken your hands off of Mr. Raymer's throat by three o'clock this afternoon, the envelope will be opened."

Jasper Grierson's teeth met in the marrow of the fat cigar. Equally without heat and without restraint, he stripped her of all that was womanly, pouring out upon her a flood of foul epithets and vile names garnished with bitter, brutal oaths. She shrank from the crude and savage upbraidings as if the words had been hot irons to touch the bare flesh, but at the end of it she was still facing him hardily.

"Calling me bad names doesn't change anything,"

she pointed out, and her tone reflected something of his own elemental contempt for the euphemisms. "You have five hours in which to make Mr. Raymer understand that you have stopped trying to smash him. Wouldn't it be better to begin on that? You can curse me out any time, you know."

Jasper Grierson's rage fit, or the mud-volcano manifestation of it, passed as suddenly as it had broken out. Swinging heavily in his chair he took up the papers again and reread them thoughtfully.

"You had a spotter working this up, I suppose: who is he, and where is he?" he demanded.

"That is my affair. He was a high-priced man and he did his work well. You can see that for yourself."

Once more the papers were tossed aside and the big chair swung slowly to face the situation.

"Let's see what you want: show up your hand."

"I have shown it. Take the prop of your backing from behind this labor trouble, and let Mr. Raymer settle with his men on a basis of good-will and fair dealing."

"Is that all?"

"No. You must cancel this pine-land deal. You have broken bread with Mr. Galbraith as a friend, and I'm not going to let you be worse than an Arab."

Grierson's shaggy brows met in a reflective frown, and when he spoke the bestial temper was rising again.

"When this is all over, and you've gone to live

with Raymer, I'll kill him," he said, with an outthrust of the hard jaw; adding: "You know me, Madge."

"I thought I did," was the swift retort. "But it was a mistake. And as for taking it out on Mr. Raymer, you'd better wait until I go 'to live with him,' as you put it. Besides, this isn't Yellow Dog Gulch. They hang people here."

"You little she-devil! If you push me into this thing, you'd better get Raymer, or somebody, to take you in. You'll be out in the street!"

"I have thought of that, too," she said, coolly; "about quitting you. I'm sick of it all—the getting and the spending and the crookedness. I'd put the money—yours and mine—in a pile and set fire to it, if some decent man would give me a calico dress and a chance to cook for two."

"Raymer, for instance?" the father cut in, in heavy mockery.

"Mr. Raymer has asked me to marry him, if you care to know," she struck back.

"Oho! So that's the milk in the cocoanut, is it? You sold me out to buy in with him!"

"You may put it that way, if you like; I don't care." She was drawing on her driving-gloves methodically and working the fingers into place, and there were sullen fires in the brooding eyes.

"I've been thinking it was the other one—the book-writer," said the father. Then, without warning: "He's a damned crook."

The daughter went on smoothing the wrinkles

out of the fingers of her gloves. "What makes you think so?" she inquired, with indifference, real or skilfully assumed.

"He's got too much money to be straight. I've been keeping cases on him."

"Never mind Mr. Griswold," she interposed. "He is my friend, and I suppose that is enough to make you hate him. About this other matter: ten minutes before three o'clock this afternoon I shall go back to Mr. Raymer. If he tells me that his troubles are straightening themselves out, I'll get the papers."

"You'll bring 'em here to me?"

"Some day; after I'm sure that you have broken off the deal with Mr. Galbraith."

Jasper Grierson let his daughter get as far as the door before he stopped her with a blunt-pointed arrow of contempt.

"I suppose you've fixed it up to marry that college-sharp dub so that his mother and sister can rub it into you right?" he sneered.

"You can suppose again," she returned, shortly. "If I should marry him, it would be out of pure spite to those women."

"If?"

"Yes, 'if.' Because, when he asked me, I told him No. You weren't counting on that, were you?" And having fired this final shot of contradiction she departed.

After Miss Grierson had driven home from the bank between ten and eleven in the morning, an

admiring public saw her no more until just before bank-closing hours in the afternoon. Broffin was among those who made obeisance to her as she passed down Main Street in the basket phaeton between half-past two and three; and a minute later he abandoned his chair on the hotel porch to keep the phaeton in view and to mark its route.

"It's Raymer, all right, and not the other one," he mused when the little vehicle had gone rocketing over the railroad crossing to take the turn toward the Iron Works. "The iron-man is the duck she's tryin' to help out of the labor-rookus. She was over there this morning, and she's goin' there again, right now."

As the phaeton sped along through the over-crossing suburb there were signs of an armistice apparent, even before the battle-field was reached. Pottery Flat was populated again, and the groups of men bunched on the street corners were arguing peacefully. Miss Grierson pulled up at one of the corners and beckoned to the young iron-moulder who had offered to be her horse-holder on the morning visit.

"Anything new, Malcolm?" she asked.

"You bet your sweet life!" said the young moulder, meeting her, as most men did, on a plane of perfect equality and frankness. "We was hoodooed to beat the band, and Mr. Raymer's got us, comin' and goin'. There wasn't no orders from the big Federation, at all; and that crooked guy, Clancy, was a fake!"

"He has gone?" she said.

"He'd better be. If he shows himself 'round here again, there's goin' to be a mix-up."

Miss Grierson drove on, and at the Iron Works there were more of the peaceful indications. The gates were open, and a switching-engine from the railroad yards was pushing in a car-load of furnace coal. By all the signs the trouble flood was abating.

Raymer saw her when she drove under his window and calmly made a hitching-post of the clerk who went out to see what she wanted. A moment later she came down the corridor to stand in the open doorway of the manager's room.

"I'm back again," she said, and her manner was that of the dainty soubrette with whom the audience falls helplessly in love at first sight.

"No, you're not," Raymer denied; "you won't be until you come in and sit down."

She entered to take the chair he was placing for her, and the soubrette manner fell away from her like a garment flung aside.

"You are still alone?" she asked.

"Yes; Griswold hasn't shown up since morning. I don't know what has become of him."

"And the labor trouble: is that going to be settled?"

He looked away and ran his fingers through his hair as one still puzzled and bewildered. "Some sort of a miracle has been wrought," he said. "A little while ago a committee came to talk over terms

of surrender. It seems that the whole thing was the result of a—of a mistake."

"Yes," she returned quietly, "it was just that—a mistake." And then: "You are going to take them back?"

"Certainly. The plant will start up again in the morning." Then his curiosity broke bounds. "I can't understand it. How did you work the miracle?"

"Perhaps I didn't work it."

"I know well enough you did, in some way."

She dismissed the matter with a toss of the pretty head. "What difference does it make so long as you are out of the deep water and in a place where you can wade ashore? You *can* wade ashore now, can't you?"

He nodded. "This morning I should have said that we couldn't; but now—" he reached over to his desk and handed her a letter to which was pinned a telegram less than an hour old.

She read the letter first. It was a curt announcement of the withdrawal of the Pineboro Railroad's repair work. The telegram was still briefer: "Disregard my letter of yesterday"; this, and the signature, "Atherton." The small plotter returned the correspondence with a little sigh of relief. It had been worse than she had thought, and it was now better than she had dared hope.

"I must be going," she said, rising. "If you will give me my envelope?"

He crossed to the safe and got it for her. His

curiosity was still keen-edged, but he beat it back manfully.

"I wish you wouldn't hurry," he said hospitably. He was searching the changeful eyes for the warrant to say more, but he could not find it.

"Yes, I really must," she insisted. "You know we have a sick man at home, and——"

"Oh, yes; how is Mr. Galbraith getting along? He has been having a pretty hard time of it, hasn't he?"

"Very hard. It is still doubtful if his life can be saved."

"He is conscious?"

"He has been to-day."

"And he understands his condition?"

"Perfectly. He had us wire for some of his bank people this morning. The cashier can't come, but he is sending a Mr. Johnson—the paying teller, I believe he is."

"Poor old man!" said Raymer, and his sympathy was real.

She was moving toward the door, and he went with her.

"I know you are not entertaining now—with Mr. Galbraith to be cared for; but I'd like to come and see you, if I may?" he said, when he had gone with her through the outer office and the moment of leave-taking had arrived.

"Why not?" she asked frankly. "You have always been welcome, and you always will be."

He hesitated, and a blond man's flush crept up

under his honest eyes. "I've been hoping all day that you didn't really mean what you said this morning—about my mother and sister, you know," he ventured.

"Yes," she affirmed relentlessly; "I did mean it."

"But some day you will change your mind—when you come to know them better."

"Shall I?" she said, with a ghost of a smile. "Perhaps you are right—when I come to know them better."

He was obliged to let it go at that; but when they reached the phaeton, and the horse-holding clerk had been relieved, he spoke of another matter.

"I'm a little worried about Kenneth," he told her. "He came down this morning looking positively wretched, but he wouldn't admit that he was sick. Have you seen much of him lately?"

"Not very much"—guardedly. "Did you say he had gone home?"

"I don't know where he has gone. He left here about half an hour before you came, and I haven't seen him since."

"And you are worried because he doesn't look well?"

"Not altogether on that account. I'm afraid he is in deep water of some kind. I never saw a person change as he has in the past week or so. You know him pretty well, and what a big heart he has?"

She nodded, half-mechanically.

"Well, there have been times lately when I've

been afraid he'd kill somebody—in this squabble of ours, you know. He has been going armed—which was excusable enough, under the circumstances—and night before last, when we were walking uptown together, I had all I could do to keep him from taking a pot-shot at a fellow who, he thought, was following us. I don't know but I'm taking all sorts of an unfair advantage of him, telling you this behind his back, but——"

"No; I'm glad you have told me. Maybe I can help."

He put her into the low basket seat, and tucked the dust-robe around her carefully. While he was doing it he looked up into her face and said: "I'd love you awfully hard for what you have done to-day—if you'd let me."

It was like her to smile straight into his eyes when she answered him.

"When you can say that—in just that way—to the right woman, you'll find a great happiness lying in wait for you, Edward, dear." And then she spoke to the Morgan mare and distance came between.

As once before, in the earlier hours of the same day, Miss Grierson took the roundabout way between the Raymer plant and Mereside, making the circuit which took her through the college grounds and brought her out at the head of upper Shawnee Street. The Widow Holcomb was sitting on her front porch, placidly crocheting, when the phaeton drew up at the curb.

"Mr. Griswold," said the phaeton's occupant.

"May I trouble you to tell him that I'd like to speak to him a moment?"

Mrs. Holcomb, friend of the Raymers, the Farnhams, and the Oswalds, and own cousin to the Barrs, was of the perverse minority; and, apart from this, she had her own opinion of a young woman who would wait at the door of a young man's boarding-house and take him off for a night drive to goodness only knew where, and from which he did not return until goodness only knew when. So there was no stitch missed in the crocheting when she said, stiffly: "Mr. Griswold isn't in. He hasn't been home since morning."

Miss Grierson drove on, and the most casual observer might have remarked the strained tightening of the lips and the two red spots which came and went in the damask-peach cheeks. But it was not until she had reached Mereside, and had gained the shelter of the deserted library, that speech came.

"O pitiful Christ!" she sobbed, dropping into a chair and hiding her face in the crook of her arm; "he's done it at last!—he's trying to hide, and that's what they've been waiting for! *And I don't know where to look!*"

But Matthew Broffin, tilting lazily in his chair on the down-town hotel porch, knew very well where to look, and he was watching the one outlet of the hiding-place as an alert, though outwardly disregardful, house-cat watches a mouse's hole.

XXXVII

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

On no less an authority than that of the great doctor who came again from Chicago for a second consultation with Doctor Farnham, Andrew Galbraith owed his life during the two days following his return to consciousness to the unremitting care and devotion of one person.

Seconding the efforts of the physicians, and skilfully directing those of the nurses, Margery threw herself into the vicarious struggle with the generous self-sacrifice which counts neither cost nor loss; and on the third day she had her reward. Her involuntary guest and charge was distinctly better, and again, so the two doctors declared, the balance was inclining slightly toward recovery.

It was in the afternoon of this third day, when she had been reading to him, at his own request, the sayings of the Man on the Mount, that he referred for the first time to the details of the accident which had so nearly blotted him out. Upon his asking, she related the few and simple facts of the rescue, modestly minimizing her own part in it, and giving her companion in the catboat full credit.

"The writer-man," he said thoughtfully, when she had finished telling him how Griswold had

worked over him in the boat, and how he would not give up. "I remember; you fetched him out to the hotel with you one day: no, you needna fear I'll be forgetting him." Then, with a shrewd look out of the steel-gray eyes: "How long have you been knowing him, Maggie, child?"

"Oh, for quite a long time," she hastened to say. "He came here, sick and helpless, one day last spring, and—well, there isn't any hospital here in Wahaska, you know, so we took him in and helped him get over the fever, or whatever it was. This was his room while he stayed with us."

Andrew Galbraith wagged his head on the pillow. "I know," he said. "And ye're doing it again for a poor auld man whose siller has never bought him anything like the love you're spending on him. You're everybody's good angel, I'm thinking, Maggie, lassie." Though he did not realize it, his sickness was bringing him day by day nearer to his far-away boyhood in the Inverness-shire hills, and it was easy to slip into the speech of the mother-tongue. Then, after a long pause, he went on: "He wasna wearing a beard, a red beard trimmed down to a spike—this writer-man, when ye found him, was he?"

She shook her head. "No; I have never seen him with a beard."

The sick man turned his face to the wall, and after a time she heard him repeating softly the words which she had just read to him. "But if ye forgive not men . . . neither will your Father forgive. . . . "

And again, "Judge not that ye be not judged." When he turned back to her there were new lines of suffering in the gray old face.

"I'm sore beset, child; sore beset," he sighed. "You were telling me that MacFarland and Johnson will he here to-night?"

"Yes; they should both reach Wahaska this evening."

Another pause, and at the end of it: "That man Broffin: you'll remember you asked me one day who he was, and I tell 't ye he was a special officer for the bank. Is he still here?"

"He is; I saw him on the street this morning."

Again Andrew Galbraith turned his face away, and he was quiet for so long a time that she thought he had fallen asleep. But he had not.

"You're thinking something of the writer-man, lassie? Don't mind the clavers of an auld man who never had a chick or child of his ain."

Her answer was such as a child might have made. She lifted the big-jointed hand on the coverlet and pressed it softly to her flushed cheek, and he understood.

"I thought so; I was afraid so," he said, slowly. "You say you have known him a long time: it canna have been long enough, bairnie."

"But it is," she insisted, loyally. "I know him better than he knows himself; oh, very much better."

"Ye know the good in him, maybe; there's good in all men, I'm thinking now, though there was a time when I didna believe it."

"I know the good and the bad—and the bad is only the good turned upside down."

Again the sick man wagged his head on the pillow and closed his eyes.

"Ye're a loving lassie, Maggie, and that's a' there is to it," he commented; and after another interval: "What must be, must be. We spoke of this man Broffin: I must see him before Johnson comes. Can ye get him for me, Maggie, child?"

She nodded and went down-stairs to the telephone, returning almost immediately.

"I was fortunate enough to catch him at the hotel. He will be here in a few minutes," was the word she brought; and Galbraith thanked her with his eyes.

"When he comes, ye'll let me see him alone—just for a few minutes," he begged; and beyond that he said no more.

It was after the click of the gate latch had announced Broffin's arrival that Margery drew the shades to shut out the glare of the afternoon sun, lowering the one at the bed's head so that the light no longer fell upon the instruments of the small house-telephone-set mounted upon the wall beside the door.

"Mr. Broffin is here, and I'll send him up," she said. "But you mustn't let him stay long, and you mustn't try to talk too much."

The sick man promised, and as she was going away she turned to repeat the caution. Andrew Galbraith's eyes were closed in weariness, and he did not see that she was standing with her back to

the wall while she admonished him, or that, when she had gone to send the visitor up, the ear-piece of the house-telephone-set had been detached from its hook and left dangling by its wire cord.

Miss Grierson went on into the library after she had met the detective at the door and had told him how to find the up stairs room. When the sound of a cautiously closed door told her that Broffin had entered the sick-room, she snatched the receiver of the library house-'phone from its hook and held it to her ear. For a little time keen anxiety wrote its sign manual in the knitted brows and the tightly pressed lips. Then she smiled and the dark eyes grew softly radiant. "The dear old saint!" she whispered; "the dear, *dear* old saint!" And when Broffin came down a few minutes later, she went to open the hall door for him, serenely demure and with honey on her tongue, as befitted the rôle of "everybody's good angel."

"Did you find him worse than you feared, or better than you hoped?" she asked.

"He's mighty near the edge, I should say—what? But you never can tell. Some of these old fellows can claw back to the top o' the hill after all the doctors in creation have thrown up their hands. I've seen it. What does Doc Farnham say?"

"What he always says; 'while there's life, there's hope.'"

Broffin nodded and went his way down the walk, stopping at the gate to take up the cigar he had hidden on his arrival.

"So Galbraith's out of it, lock, stock and barrel," he muttered, as he strode thoughtfully townward. "I reckoned it'd be that-a-way, as soon as I heard the story o' that shipwreck. And now I ain't so blamed sure that it's Raymer a-holdin' the fort in them pretty black eyes. The old man talked like a man that had just been honeyfugled and talked over and primed plum' up to the muzzle. Why the blue blazes can't she take her iron-moulder fellow and be satisfied? She can't swing to *both* of 'em. Ump! —the old man wanted me to skip out on a wild-goose chase to 'Frisco in that bond business, and take the first train! Sure, I'll go—but not to-day; oh, no, by grapples; not this day!"

It was possibly an hour beyond Broffin's visit when Margery, having successfully read the sick man to sleep, tiptoed out of the room and went below stairs to shut herself into the hall telephone closet. The number she asked for was that of the Raymer Foundry and Machine Works, and Raymer, himself, answered the call.

"Are you awfully busy?" she asked.

"Up to my chin—yes. But that doesn't count if I can do anything for you."

"Have you heard anything yet from Mr.—from our friend?"

"Not a word. But I'm not worrying any more now."

"Why aren't you?"

"Because I've been remembering that he is the happy—or unhappy—possessor of the 'artistic tem-

perament' and that accounts for anything and everything. I'd forgotten that for a few minutes, you know."

"Well?" she said, with the faintest possible accent of impatience.

"He has gone off somewhere to plug away on that book of his; I'm sure of it. And he hasn't gone very far. I'm inclined to believe that Mrs. Holcomb knows where he is—only she won't tell. And somebody else knows, too."

"Who is the somebody else?"

Though the wire was in a measure public, Raymer risked a single word.

"Charlotte."

None of the sudden passion that leaped into Margery Grierson's eyes was suffered to find its way into her voice when she said: "What makes you think that?"

"Oh, a lot of little things. I was over at the house last night, and there is some sort of a tea-pot tempest going on; I couldn't make out just what. But from the way things shaped up, I gathered that our friend was wanted in Lake Boulevard, and wanted bad—for some reason or other. I had to promise that I'd try to dig him up, before I got away."

"Well?" went the questioning word over the wires, and this time the impatient accent was unconcealed.

"I promised; but this morning Doctor Bertie called me up to say that it was all right; that I needn't trouble myself."

"And I needn't have troubled you," said the voice at the Mereside transmitter. "Excuse *me*, as Hank Billingsly used to say when he happened to shoot the wrong man. Come over when you feel like it—and have time. You mustn't forget that you owe me two calls. Good-by."

After Margery Grierson had let herself out of the stifling little closet under the hall stair, she went into the darkened library and sat for a long time staring at the cold hearth. It was a crooked world, and just now it was a sharply cruel one. There was much to be read between the lines of the short telephone talk with Edward Raymer. The trap was sprung and its jaws were closing; and in his extremity Kenneth Griswold was turning, not to the woman who had condoned and shielded and paid the costly price, but to the other.

"Dear God!" she said softly, when the prolonged stare had brought the quick-springing tears to her eyes; "and I—*I* could have kept him safe!"

XXXVIII

THE PENDULUM-SWING

To a man seeking only to escape from himself, all roads are equal and all destinations likely to prove uniformly disappointing. Turning his back upon the Iron Works in the day of defeat, with no very clear idea of what he should do or where he should go, Griswold pushed through the strikers' picket lines, and, avoiding the militant suburb, drifted by way of sundry outlying residence streets and a country road to the high ground back of the city.

In deserting Raymer he was actuated by no motive of disloyalty. On the contrary, so much of the motive as had any bearing upon his relations with the young iron-founder sprang from a generous impulse to free Raymer from an incubus. If it were the curse of the Midas-touch to turn all things to gold, it seemed to be his own peculiar curse to turn the gold to dross; to leave behind him a train of disaster, defeat, and tragic depravity. The plunge into the labor conflict had merely served to afford another striking example of his inability to break the evil spell, and Raymer could well spare him.

On the long tramp to the hills the events of the past few months marshalled themselves in accusing review. No human being, save one, of all those with whom he had come in contact since the day of dragon-bearding in the New Orleans bank had escaped the contaminating touch, and each in turn had suffered loss. The man Gavitt had given his name and identity; the mate of the *Belle Julie* had sacrificed what little respect he may have had for law and order by becoming, potentially, at least, a criminal accessory. The little Irish cab-driver had sold himself for a price; and the negro deck-hand had earned his mess of fried fish. The single exception was Charlotte Farnham, and he told himself that she had escaped only because she had done her duty as she saw it.

And as the bedeviling thing had begun, so it had continued, losing none of its potency for evil. In the little world of Wahaska, which was to have been the theatre of Utopian demonstration, the curse had persisted. The money, used with the loftiest intentions, had served only as a means to an end, and the end had proved to be the rearing of an apparently impassable wall of bitter antagonism between master and men. And the secret of the money's origin and acquisition, which was to have been so easily cast aside and ignored, had become a soul-sickness incurable and even contagious. Griswold was beginning to suspect that it had attacked Margery Grierson; that it had subconsciously, if not otherwise, thrust itself into Charlotte Farnham's life; and the night

of horror so lately past had shown him into what depths it could plunge its wretched guardian and slave.

Now that the plunge had been taken and he had been made to understand that he must henceforth reckon with a base and cowardly under-self which would not stop short of the most heinous crime, he told himself that he must have time to think—to plan.

Caring nothing for its roughness, and scarcely noting the direction in which it was leading him, he followed the country road in its winding descent into a valley forest of oaks. After an hour of aimless tramping he began to have occasional near-hand glimpses of the lake; and a little farther along he came out upon the main-travelled road leading to the summer-resort hotel at the head of De Soto Bay.

Still without any definite purpose in mind he pushed on, and upon reaching the hotel he went in and registered for a room. The luncheon hour was past, but not even the long tramp had given him an appetite. Choosing the quietest corner of the lake-facing veranda he tried to smoke; but the tobacco had lost its flavor, and a longing for completer solitude drove him to his room. Here he drew the window shades and lay down, deliberately wishing that he might fall asleep and wake in some less poignant world; and since the week of strife had been cutting deeply into the nights, the first half of the wish presently came true. While the poignan-

cies were still asserting themselves acutely, sleep stole upon him, and when he awoke it was evening and a cheerful clamor in the dining-room beneath told him that it was dinner-time.

It is a trite saying that many a gulf, seemingly impassable, has been safely bridged in sleep. Bathed, refreshed and with the tramping stains removed, Griswold went down to dinner with the lost appetite regained. A leisurely hour spent in the restorative atmosphere of the well-filled dining-room added its uplift, and at the end of it the troublesome perplexities and paradoxes had withdrawn—at least far enough so that they could be held in the artistic perspective. Afterward, during the cigar-smoking on the cool veranda, he struck out his plan. In the morning he would send in town to Mrs. Holcomb for a few necessaries, and telephone to Raymer. After which, he would try what a fallow day or two would do for him; an interval in which he could weigh and measure and think, and possibly recover the lost sense of proportion.

As the plan was conceived, so it was carried out. Early on the following day he sent a note to Mrs. Holcomb by one of the Inn employees; but the copy of the *Daily Wahaskan* laid beside his breakfast plate made it unnecessary to telephone Raymer. The paper had a full account of the sudden ending of the lock-out and the resumption of work in the Raymer plant, and he read it with a curious stirring of self-compassion. As he had reasoned it out, there was only one way in which the result could

have been attained so quickly. Had Raymer taken that way, in spite of his wrathful rejection of the suggestion? Doubtless he had; and on the heels of that conclusion came a sense of deprivation that was fairly appalling, and the healthy breakfast appetite vanished. Griswold knew what it meant, or he thought he did. Margery Grierson was gone out of his life—gone beyond recall.

After that, there was all the better reason why he should grapple with himself in the fallow interval; and for two complete days he was lost, even to the small world of the summer resort, tramping for hours in the lake shore forests or drifting about in one of the hotel skiffs, and returning to the Inn only to eat and sleep when hunger or weariness constrained him. On the whole, the discipline was good. He flattered himself that the sense of proportion was returning slowly, and with it some saner impulses. Truly, it had been his misfortune to be obliged to compromise with evil to some extent, and to involve others, but was not that rather due to the ineradicable faults of an imperfect social system than to any basic defect in his own theories? And was not the same imperfect social system partly responsible for the *quasi*-criminal attitude which had been forced upon him? He was willing to believe it; willing, also, to believe that he could rise above the constraining forces and be the man he wished to be. That he could so rise was proved, he decided, on the morning of the third day, when he chanced to overhear the hotel clerk telling the man whose

room was across the corridor from his own that Andrew Galbraith still had a fighting chance for life. In the pleasant glow of the high resolve the news awakened none of the murderous promptings, but rather the generous hope that it might be true.

It was late in the afternoon of this third day, upon his return from a long pull in the borrowed skiff around the group of islands in the upper and unfrequented part of the lake, that he found a note awaiting him. It was from Miss Farnham, and its brevity, no less than its urgency, stirred him apprehensively, bringing a suggestive return of the furtive fierceness which he promptly fought down. "I must see you before eight o'clock this evening. It is of the last importance," was the wording of the note; and the heavy underscoring of the "last," and a certain tremulous characteristic in the handwriting, stressed the urgency.

Griswold thrust the note into his pocket and made his preparations to go to town, still fighting down the furtive malevolence which was unnerving him; fighting also an unshakable premonition that his hour had come. Once, before the Inn brake was ready to make its evening trip to Wahaska and the railway station, the premonition gripped him so benumbingly that he was sorely tempted. There was another railroad fourteen miles to the westward; a line running a fast day-train to the north with connections for Winnipeg. One of the Inn guests was driving over to catch this fast train at a country crossing, and there was a spare seat in the hired

carry-all. Griswold considered the alternative for the length of time it took the hotel porter to put the departing guest's luggage into the waiting vehicle. Then he turned his back and let the chance escape. The issue was fairly defined. To become a fugitive now was to plead guilty as charged—to open the door to chaos.

It was still quite early in the evening when the Inn conveyance set him down at the door of his lodgings in upper Shawnee Street. To the caretaking widow, who would have prepared a late dinner for him, he explained that he was going out again almost at once; and taking time only for a bath and a change, he set forth on the cross-town walk. It lacked something less than a half-hour of the time limit set in Miss Farnham's note, but he attached no special importance to that. He knew that the doctor's dinner-hour was early, and that in any event he could choose his own time for an evening call.

It nettled him angrily to find that the premonition of coming disaster was still with him when he crossed the Court House square and came into the main street a few doors from the Winnebago entrance. Attacking from a fresh vantage-ground it was warning him that the town hotel was the stopping-place of the man Broffin, and that he was taking an unnecessary hazard in passing it. Brushing the warning aside, he went on defiantly, and just before he came within identifying range of the loungers on the hotel porch an omnibus backed to

the curb to deliver its complement of passengers from the lately met northbound train.

Griswold walked on until he was stopped by the sidewalk-blocking group of freshly arrived travellers pausing to identify their luggage as it was handed down from the top of the omnibus. Alertly watchful, he quickly recognized Broffin among the porch loungers, and saw him leave his tilted chair to saunter toward the steps. Then the fateful thing happened. One of the luggage-sorters, a clean-limbed, handsome young fellow with boyish eyes and a good-natured grin, wheeled suddenly and gripped him.

"Why, Griswold, old man!—well, I'll be dogged! Who on the face of the earth would ever have thought of finding you here? So this is where you came up, after the long, deep, McGinty dive, is it?" Then to one of his fellow travellers: "Hold on a minute, Johnson; I want you to shake hands with an old newspaper pal of mine from New York, Mr. Kenneth Griswold. Kenneth, this is Mr. Beverly Johnson, of the Bayou State Security Bank, in New Orleans."

Thus Bainbridge, sometime star reporter for the *Louisianian*, turning up at the climaxing instant to prove the crowded condition of an over-narrow world, much as Matthew Broffin had once turned up on the after-deck of the coastwise steamer *Adelantado* to prove it to him.

While Griswold, with every nerve on edge, was acknowledging the introduction which he could by no means avoid, Broffin drew nearer. From the

porch steps he could both see and hear. Bainbridge, cheerfully loquacious, continued to do most of the talking. He was telling Griswold of the streak of good luck which had snatched him out of a reporter's berth in the South to make him night editor of one of the St. Paul dailies. Johnson was merely an onlooker. Broffin's eyes searched the teller's face. Thus far it was a blank—a rather bored blank.

"And you are on your way to St. Paul now?" Griswold said to the newspaper man. Broffin, whose ears were skilfully attuned to all the tone variations in the voice of evasion, thought he detected a quaver of anxious impatience in the half-absent query.

"Yes; I was going on through to-night, but Johnson, here, stumped me to stop over. He said I might be able to get a news story out of his sick president," Bainbridge rattled on. "Ever meet Mr. Galbraith? He is the bank president who was held up last spring, you remember; fine old Scotch gentleman of the Walter-Scott brand."

"When did you leave New Orleans?" Griswold asked; and now Broffin made sure he distinguished the note of anxiety.

"Two days back: missed a connection on account of high water in the Ohio. Might have stayed another twelve hours in the good old levee town if we'd only known, eh, Johnson?" And then again to Griswold: "Remember that supper we had at Chaudière's, the night I was leaving for the banana coast? By George! come to think of it, I believe

that was the last time we forgathered in the— Say, Kenneth, what have you done with your beard?"

Something clicked in Broffin's brain; then the wheels of the present slipped into gear with those of the past and the entire train moved on smoothly. The final doubt was cleared away. Griswold was the man whose story Bainbridge had told under the after-deck awning of the outward-bound fruit steamer; and the story in all its essentials was the same that Miss Grierson had told on the veranda of the De Soto. Broffin knew now why there had always been a haunting suggestion of familiarity in Griswold's face for him. He had seen and marked the "bloody-minded nihilist" of Bainbridge's story when the two were saying good-by on the banquette in front of Chaudière's.

Broffin's right hand went swiftly to an inside pocket of his coat and when it was withdrawn a pair of handcuffs, oiled to noiselessness, came with it. Deftly the man-catcher worked them open, using only the fingers of one hand, and never taking his eyes from the trio on the sidewalk. One last step remained: if he could only manage to get speech with Johnson first——

During the trying interval Griswold had been fully alive to his peril. He had seen the swift hand-passing, and he knew what it was that Broffin was concealing in the hand which had made the quick pocket-dive. He knew that the crucial moment had come; and, as many times before, the savage fear-mania was gripping him. In the cold vise-nip of

it he had become once more the cornered wild beast.

After the introduction to Johnson his hand had gone mechanically to his coat pocket. The demon at his ear was whispering "kill! kill!" and his fingers sought and found the weapon. While he was listening with the outward ear to Bainbridge's cheerful reminiscences, the little minutiæ were arranging themselves: he saw where Broffin would step, and was careful to mark that none of the bystanders would be in range. He would wait until there could be no possibility of missing; then he would fire—from the pocket.

It was Johnson who broke the spell. While Bainbridge was insisting that Griswold should come in and make a social third at the hotel dinner-table, the teller picked up his hand-bag and mounted the steps. Griswold's brain fell into halves. With one of them he was making excuses to the newspaper man; with the other he saw Broffin stop Johnson and draw him aside.

What the detective was saying was only too plainly evident. Johnson wheeled short to face the sidewalk group, and Griswold could feel in every fibre of him the searching scrutiny to which he was being subjected. When he stole a glance at the pair on the porch, Johnson was shaking his head slowly; and he did it again after a second thoughtful stare. Griswold, missing completely now what Bainbridge was saying, overheard the teller's low-toned rejoinder to the detective's urgings: "It's no use, Mr.

Broffin; I'd have to swear positively to it, you know, and I couldn't do that. . . . No, I don't want to hear your corroborative evidence; it might make me see a resemblance where there is none. Wait until Mr. Galbraith recovers: he's your man."

Griswold hardly knew how he made shift to get away from Bainbridge finally; but when it was done, and he was crossing the little triangular park which filled the angle between the business squares and the lake-fronting residence streets, he was sweating profusely, and the departing fear-mania was leaving him weak and tremulous.

Passing the stone-basined fountain in the middle of the park he stopped, jerked the pistol from his pocket, spilled the cartridges from its magazine, and stooped to grope for a loose stone in the walk-border. With the fountain base for an anvil and the loosened border stone for a hammer he beat the weapon into shapeless inutility and flung it away.

"God knows whom I shall be tempted to kill, next!" he groaned; and the trembling fit was still unnerving him when he went on to keep the appointment made by Charlotte Farnham.

XXXIX

DUST AND ASHES

A FULL moon, blood-red from the smoke of forest fires far to the eastward, was rising over the Wahaska Hills when Griswold unlatched the gate of the Farnham enclosure and passed quickly up the walk.

Since the summoning note had stressed the urgencies, he was not surprised to find the writer of it awaiting his coming on the vine-shadowed porch. In his welcoming there was a curious mingling of constraint and impatience, and he was moved to marvel. Miss Farnham's outlook upon life, the point of view of the ideally well-balanced, was uniformly poiseful and self-contained, and he was wondering if some fresh entanglement were threatening when she motioned him to a seat and placed her own chair so that the light from the sitting-room windows would leave her in the shadow.

"You had my note?" she began.

"Yes. It came while I was away from the hotel, and the regular trip of the Inn brake was the first conveyance I could catch. Am I late?"

Her reply was qualified. "That remains to be seen."

There was a hesitant pause, and then she went on: "Do you know why I sent for you to come."

"No, not definitely."

"I was hoping you would know; it would make it easier for me. You owe me something, Mr. Griswold."

"I owe you a great deal," he admitted, warmly. "It is hardly putting it too strong to say that you have made some part of my work possible which would otherwise have been impossible."

"I didn't mean that," she dissented, with a touch of cool scorn. "I have no especial ambition to figure as a character, however admirable, in a book. Your obligation doesn't lie in the literary field; it is real—and personal. You have done me a great injustice, and it seems to have been carefully premeditated."

The blow was so sudden and so calmly driven home that Griswold gasped.

"An injustice?—to you?" he protested; but she would not let him go on.

"Yes. At first, I thought it was only a coincidence—your coming to Wahaska—but now I know better. You came here, in goodness knows what spirit of reckless bravado, because it was my home; and you made the decision apparently without any consideration for me; without any thought of the embarrassments and difficulties in which it might involve me."

Truly, the heavens had fallen and the solid earth was reeling! Griswold lay back in the deep lounging-chair and fought manfully to retain some little hold upon the anchorings. Could this be his ideal; the woman whom he had set so high above all

others in the scale of heroic faultlessness and sublime devotion to principle? And was she so much a slave of the conventional as to be able to tell him coldly that she had recognized him again, and that her chief concern was the embarrassment it was causing her? Before he could gather the words for any adequate rejoinder, she was going on pointedly:

"You have done everything you could to make the involvement complete. You have made friends of my friends, and you came here as a friend of my father. You have drawn Edward Raymer into the entanglement and helped him with the stolen money. In every way you have sought to make it more and more impossible for me to give information against you—and you have succeeded. I can't do it now, without facing a scandal that would never die in a small place like this, and without bringing trouble and ruin upon a family of our nearest friends. And that is why I sent for you to-day; and why I say you owe me something."

Griswold was sitting up again, and he had recovered some small measure of self-possession.

"I certainly owe you many apologies, at least," he said, ironically. "I have really been doing you a great injustice, Miss Farnham—a very grave injustice, though not exactly of the kind you mention. I think I have been misapprehending you from the beginning. How long have you known me as the man who is wanted in New Orleans?"

"A long time; though I tried not to believe it at first. It seemed incredible that the man I had

spoken to on the *Belle Julie* would come here and put me in such a false position."

"Good heavens!" he broke out; "is your position all you have been thinking of? Is that the only reason why you haven't set the dogs on me?"

"It is the chief reason why I couldn't afford to do anything more than I have done. Goodness knows, I have tried in every way to warn you, even to pointing out the man who is shadowing you. To do it, I have had to deceive my father. I have been hoping that you would understand and go away."

"Wait a minute," he commanded. "Let me get it straight; you still believe that the thing I did was a criminal thing?"

"We needn't go into that part of it again," she returned, with a sort of placid impatience. "Once I thought that there might be some way in which you had justified yourself to yourself, but now——"

"That isn't the point," he interrupted roughly. "What I want to know is this: Do you still believe it is a crime?"

"Of course, it is a crime; I know it, you know it, all the world knows it."

Again he sat back and took time to gather up a few of the scattered shards and fragments. When he spoke it was to say: "I think the debt is on the other side, Miss Charlotte; I think you owe me something. You probably won't understand when I say that you have robbed me of a very precious thing—my faith in the ultimate goodness of a good woman. You believe—you have always believed—that I am a

criminal; and yet you have been weak enough to let expediency seal your lips. I am truer to my code than you are to yours, as you shall see if the day ever comes when I shall be convinced that I did wrong. But that is neither here nor there. You sent for me: what is it that you want me to do?"

"I want to give you one more chance to disappoint the Wahaska gossips," she replied, entirely unmoved, as it seemed, by his harsh arraignment. "Do you know why this man Broffin is still waiting?"

"I can guess. He is taking a long chance on the chapter of accidents."

"Not altogether. Three days ago, Mr. Galbraith had Miss Grierson telegraph to New Orleans for some one of the bank officials. Yesterday I learned that the man who is coming is the teller who waited on me and who gave you the money. As soon as I heard that, I began to try to find you."

Griswold did not tell her that the danger she feared was a danger past.

"Go on," he prompted.

"You are no longer safe in Wahaska," she asserted. "The teller can identify you, and the detective will give him the opportunity. That is doubtless what he is waiting for."

"And you would suggest that I make a run for it? Is that why you sent for me?"

"It is. You are tempting fate by staying; and, notwithstanding what you have said, I still insist that you owe me something. There is a fast train west at ten o'clock. If you need ready money——"

Griswold laughed. It had gone beyond the tragic and was fast lapsing into comedy, farce.

"We are each of us appearing in a new rôle to-night, Miss Farnham," he said, with sardonic humor; "I as the hunted criminal, and you as the equally culpable accessory after the fact. If I run away, what shall be done with the—the 'swag,' the bulk of which, as you know, is tied up in Raymer's business?"

"I have thought of that," she returned calmly, "and that is another reason why you shouldn't let them take you. Right or wrong, you have incurred a fresh responsibility in your dealings with Mr. Raymer; and Edward, who is perfectly innocent, must be protected in some way."

It was not in human nature to resist the temptation to strike back.

"I have told Raymer how he can most successfully underwrite his financial risk," he said, with malice intentional.

"How?"

"By marrying Miss Grierson."

He had touched the springs of anger at last.

"That woman!" she broke out. And then: "If you have said that to Edward Raymer, I shall never forgive you as long as I live! It is your affair to secure Edward against loss in the money matter—your own individual responsibility, Mr. Griswold. He accepted the money in good faith, and——"

Again Griswold gave place to the caustic humor and finished for her.

—"And, though it is stolen money, it must not be taken away from him. Once, when I was even more foolish than I am now, I said of you that you would be a fitting heroine in a story in which the hero should be a man who might need to borrow a conscience. It's quite the other way around."

"We needn't quarrel," she said, retreating again behind the barrier of cold reserve. "I suppose I have given you the right to say disagreeable things to me, if you choose to assert it. But we are wasting time which may be very precious. Will you go away, as I have suggested?"

He found his hat and got upon his feet rather unsteadily.

"I don't know; possibly I shall. But in any event, you needn't borrow any more trouble, either on your own account, or on Raymer's. By the merest chance, I met Johnson, the teller you speak of, a few minutes ago at the Winnebago House and was introduced to him. He didn't know me, then, or later, when Broffin was telling him that he ought to know me. Hence, the matter rests as it did before—between you and Mr. Galbraith."

"Mr. Galbraith?"

"Yes. That was a danger past, too, a short time ago. I met him, socially, and he didn't recognize me. Afterward, Broffin pointed me out to him, and again he failed to identify me. But the other day, after I had pulled him out of the lake, he remembered. I've been waiting to see what he will do."

"He will do nothing. You saved his life."

Griswold shook his head.

"I am still man enough to hope that he won't let the bit of personal service make him compound a felony."

"Why do you call it that?" she demanded.

"Because, from his point of view, and yours, that is precisely what it is; and it is what you are doing, Miss Farnham. I, the criminal, say this to you. You should have given me up the moment you recognized me. That is your creed, and you should have lived up to it. Since you haven't, you have wronged yourself and have made me the poorer by a thing that——"

"Stop!" she cried, standing up to face him. "Do you mean to tell me that you are ungrateful enough to——"

"No; ingratitude isn't quite the word. I'm just sorry; with the sorrow you have when you look for something that you have a right to expect, and find that it isn't there; that it has never been there; that it isn't anywhere. You have hurt me, and you have hurt yourself; but there is still a chance for you. When I am gone, go to the telephone and call Broffin at the Winnebago House. You can tell him that he will find me at my rooms. Good-by."

He was half-way to the foot of Lakeview Avenue, striding along moodily with his head down and his hands behind him, when he collided violently with Raymer going in the opposite direction. The shock was so unexpected that Griswold would have been knocked down if the muscular young iron-founder

had not caught him promptly. At the saving instant came mutual recognition.

"Hello, there!" said Raymer. "You are the very man I've been looking for. Charlotte wants to see you."

"Not now she doesn't," was the rather grim contradiction. "I have just left her."

"Oh."

There was a pause, and then Griswold cut in morosely.

"So you did take my way out of the labor trouble, after all, didn't you?"

Raymer looked away.

"I don't know just how you'd like to have me answer that, Kenneth. How much or how little do you know of what happened?"

"Nothing at all"—shortly.

"Well, it was Margery who wrought the miracle, of course. I don't know, yet, just how she did it; but it was done, and done right."

"And you have asked her to marry you?"

"Suffering Scott! how you do come at a man! Yes, I asked her, if you've got to know."

"Well?" snapped Griswold.

"She—she turned me down, Kenneth; got up and walked all over me. That's a horrible thing to make me say, but it's the truth."

"I don't understand it, Raymer. Was it the No that means No?"

"I don't understand it either," returned the iron-founder, with grave naïveté. "And, yes, I guess

she meant it. But that reminds me. She knew I was looking for you and she gave me a note—let me see, I've got it here somewhere; oh, yes, here it is—gilt monogram and all."

Griswold took the note and pocketed it without comment and without looking at it.

"Were you going to Doctor Bertie's?" he asked.

"I was. Have you any objection?"

"Not the least in the world. It's a good place for you to go just now, and I guess you are the right man for the place. Good-night."

At the next corner where there was an electric light, Griswold stopped and opened the monogrammed envelope. The enclosure was a single sheet of perfumed note-paper upon which, without date, address or signature was written the line:

"Mr. Galbraith is better—and he is grateful."

XL

APPLES OF ISTAKHAR

THE swinging arc-light suspended above the street-crossing sputtered and died down to a dull red dot of incandescence as Griswold returned Margery's note to his pocket and walked on.

There are crises in which the chief contention looms so large as to leave no room for the ordinary mental processes. Griswold saw no significance in the broken line of Margery's message. The one tremendous revelation—the knowledge that the dross-creating curse had finally fallen upon the woman whose convictions should have saved her—was blotting out all the subtler perceptive faculties; and for the time the struggle with the submerging wave of disappointment and disheartenment was bitter.

He was two squares beyond the crossing of the broken-circuited arc-light, and was still following the curve of the lakeside boulevard, when he came to the surface of the submerging wave long enough to realize that he had entered Jasper Grierson's portion of the water-front drive. The great house, dark as to its westward gables save for the lighted upper windows marking the sick-room and its ante-chamber, loomed in massive solidity among its sheltering oaks; and the moon, which had now

topped the hills and the crimsoning smoke haze, was bathing land- and lake-scape in a flood of silver light, whitening the pale yellow sands of the beach and etching fantastic leaf-traceries on the gravel of the boulevarded driveway.

There was no enclosing fence on the Mereside border of the boulevard, and under the nearest of the lawn oaks there were rustic park seats, Jasper Grierson's single concession to the public when he had fought for and secured his property right-of-way through to the lake's margin. Griswold turned aside and sat down on one of the benches. The disappointment was growing less keen. He was beginning to understand that he had made no allowance for the eternal feminine in the idealized *Fidelia*—for the feminine and the straitly human. But the disheartenment remained. Should he stay and fight it out? Or should he take pity upon the poor prisoner of the conventions and seek to postpone the day of reckoning by flight?

He had not fitted the answer to either of these sharp-pointed queries when a pair of light-fingered hands came from behind to clap themselves upon his eyes, and a well-known voice said, "Guess."

"Margery!" he said; and she laughed with the joyous unconstraint of a happy child and came around to sit by him.

"I was doing time out on the veranda, and I saw you down here in the moonlight, looking as if you had lost something," she explained, adding: "Have you?"

"I don't know; can you lose that which you've never had?" he returned musingly. And then: "Yes; perhaps I did lose something. Don't ask me what it is. I hardly know, myself."

"You have just come from Doctor Bertie's?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"And Charlotte doesn't want to marry you?"

"Heavens and earth!" he exploded. "Who put the idea into your head that I wanted to marry her?"

"You did"—calmly.

"Then, for pity's sake, let me take it out, quick. If I were the last man on earth, Miss Farnham wouldn't marry me; and if she were the last woman, I think I'd go drown myself in the lake!"

The young woman of the many metamorphoses was laughing again, and this time the laugh was a letter-perfect imitation of a school-girl giggle.

"My!" she said. "How dreadfully hard she must have sat on you!"

"Please don't laugh," he pleaded; "unless you are the heartless kind of person who would laugh at a funeral. I'm down under the hoofs of the horses, at last, Margery, girl. Before you came, I was wondering if the game were at all worth the candle."

Her mood changed in the twinkling of an eye. "The battle is over, and won," she said, speaking softly. "Didn't you know that?" And then: "Oh, boy, boy! but it has been a desperate fight! Time and again I have thought you were gone, in spite of all I could do!"

"You thought—I was gone? Then you know?"

"Of course I know; I have known ever since the first night; the night when I found the money in your suit-case. What a silly, silly thing it was for you to do—to leave the Bayou State Security slips on the packages!"

"But you said——"

"No, I didn't say; I merely let you believe that I didn't see them. After that, I knew it would be only a question of time until they would trace you here, and I hurried; oh, I *hurried!* I made up my mind that before the struggle came, all Wahaska should know you, not as a bank robber, but as you are, and I made it come out just that way. Then Mr. Broffin turned up, and the fight was on. He shadowed you, and I shadowed him—or had Johnnie Fergus do it for me. I knew he'd try Miss Farnham first, and there was only one hope there—that she might fall in love with you and so refuse to give you away. She did, didn't she?"

"Most emphatically, she did not," he denied. "You have greatly misjudged Miss Farnham. The reason—the only reason—why she did not tell Broffin what he wanted to know was a purely conventional one. She did not want to be the most-talked-of woman in Wahaska."

His companion's laugh was not pleasant.

"I'd rather be a spiteful little cat, which is what she once called me, than to be moth-eaten on the inside, like that!" she commented. Then she went on: "With Miss Farnham out of it—and I knew

she must be out of it, since Broffin didn't strike—there was still Mr. Galbraith. You didn't know why I was so anxious to have you get acquainted with him, but you know now. And it worked. When Broffin asked him to identify you, he couldn't—or wouldn't. Then came that unlucky drowning accident."

Griswold nodded slowly. "Yes, Mr. Galbraith knows me now."

"He doesn't!" she exulted. "He is a dear old saint, and he will never know you again as the man who held him up. Listen: he sent for Broffin this afternoon, and gave him a new commission—something about bonds in California. And he told him he must go on the first train!"

Once more the castaway was running the gamut of the fiercely varying emotions.

"Let me understand," he said. "You knew I had taken the money, and yet you did all these things to pull me out and make the hold-up a success. Where was your moral sense, all this time, little girl?"

She made a charming little mouth at him.

"I am *Joan*, and the *Joans* don't have any moral senses—to speak of—do they? That's the way you are writing it down in your book, isn't it?" Then, with a low laugh that sounded some unfathomed depth of loving abandonment: "It was a game; and I played it—played it for all I was worth, and won. You are free; free as the air, Kenneth, boy. If Broffin should come here this minute and put

his hand on your shoulder, you could look up and laugh in his face. Are you glad—or sorry?"

His answer was the answer of the man who was, for the time being, neither the moralist nor the criminal. With a swift out-reaching he drew her to him, crushed her in his arms, covered her face with kisses.

"I am glad—glad that I am your lover," he whispered, passionately. "God, girl! but you are a woman to die for! No, not yet"—when she would have slipped out of his arms—"Believe me, Margery; there has never been any one else—not for a moment. But I thought it was Raymer, and for your sake and his I could have stepped aside; I did try to step aside. That is the one decent thing I have done in all this devilish business. Are you listening?"

She had stopped struggling, and was hiding her face on his shoulder. He felt her quick little nod and went on.

"Since you know the one decent thing, you must know all the horrible things, too. A dozen times I have been a murderer in heart, and once . . . you know: I meant to let Galbraith die, that night."

She looked up quickly.

"No, boy, I'll never believe that—never! If you had stayed awake until the time came, you couldn't have done it. And, besides, I am to blame. I planned it—planned it purposely. I didn't even hope to find a nurse when we were supposed to be looking for one. I knew how you felt, and I wanted

to make you show yourself that you didn't really hate him bad enough to let him die. But I don't care; it doesn't matter—nothing matters, now."

"Wait," he said. "There was murder in my heart that night, and it was there again this evening—just a little while ago. Miss Farnham and Galbraith were not the only ones I had to fear; there was another; the teller who got here from New Orleans on the seven-forty-five train. You didn't know about him, did you? He came, and an old newspaper friend of mine was with him. I stumbled upon them on the sidewalk in front of the Winnebago House; and Broffin was there, too. We were introduced, the teller and I, and Broffin was so sure he had me that he got his handcuffs out and was opening them."

Margery shuddered and hid her face again. "And I—I didn't know!" she gasped.

"Luck was with me again," he continued. "Johnson didn't remember me; refused to do so even when Broffin stopped him and tried to tell him who I was. I had a pistol in my pocket, and it was aimed at Broffin. If he had made a move to take me, I should certainly have killed him."

She sat up suddenly.

"Give me that pistol, Kenneth—give it to me *now!*"

"I can't," he confessed, shamefacedly. "When it was all over, I smashed the pistol with a stone and threw it away."

She drew a long breath. "Is that all?" she asked.

"All but one thing; the worst of them all . . . that day in the bank vault——"

The daughter of men buried her face on his shoulder again at that. "Don't!" she begged. "You couldn't help it, boy; I made you do it—meaning to. There! and I said that wild horses should never drag it out of me!"

Again he said, "Wait," and covered the shining head on his shoulder with a caressing hand. "It wasn't love, then, little girl; that's what it breaks my heart to tell you: it was just madness. And it wasn't clean; you've got to know that, too."

She nodded her head violently. "I know," she murmured; "I knew it at the time, and that was what made me cry. But now it's—it's different, isn't it, boy? now you—are——"

"You have heard it all, Margery. You know what I thought I was, and what I have turned out to be. I'm afraid I am just a common crook, after all; there doesn't seem to be standing-room anywhere else for me. But every living fibre of me, the good and the bad, loves you—loves you!"

"What do I care for anything else?" she flashed back. "You are you, Kenneth, dear; that is all I know, and all I care for. If you had stolen all the money in the world, and had killed a dozen men to make your get-away, it would be just the same. Only——"

"Only what?" he demanded jealously.

"It would be just the same to me; but—but. . . . Oh, boy, dear! it will never, *never* be the same to you!"

"I—I don't understand," he stammered.

"Some day you will. You call yourself a crook: man, man! there isn't a crooked drop of blood in you! Don't I know? You persuaded yourself that you had a right to take this money; perhaps you did have; *I* don't say you didn't. When I see anything I want, I reach out and take it, if I can—and I guess most people would, if they dared. But you are different; you are *good*. Some day all these dreadful things that have come tagging along after the fact will rise up and gnash their teeth at you and tell you that it was a *sin*, a *crime*. And then—oh, boy, dear! then I shall lose you!"

Very gently he took her in his arms again; and for a time all things sensible and tangible, the deserted driveway, and the plashing of the little waves on the sands, the staring moonlight and the stencilled shadows of the oaks, were forgotten in the great soul-healing silence that wrapped them about and enveloped them.

"Margery," he began, when the interval of thoughtful heart-searching had done its illuminative work, "what would you say if I should tell you that your 'some day' has already come?"

She started as if he had thrust a knife into her. Then she slipped out of his arms and caught up his hand to press it against her cheek.

"I should say, 'Whatsoever seemeth good in the eyes of my dear lord, so let it be.'"

"But think a moment, girl; if one has done wrong, there must be atonement. That is the higher law

—the highest law—and no man may evade it. Do you know what that would mean for me?"

"It is the Price, boy, dear; I don't ask you to pay it. Listen: my father and I have agreed to disagree, and he has turned over to me a lot of money that he took from—that was once my mother's brother's share in the Colorado gold claims. What is mine is yours. We can pay back the money. Will that do?"

He was shaking his head slowly. "No," he said, "I think it wouldn't do."

"I was afraid it wouldn't," she sighed, "but I had to try. Are they still gnashing their teeth at you?—the dreadful things, I mean?"

He did not answer in words, but she knew, and held her peace. At the end of the ends he sprang up suddenly and drew her to her feet.

"I can't do it, Margery, girl! I can't ask you to wait—and afterward to marry a convict! Think of it—even if Galbraith were willing to withdraw, the law wouldn't let him, and I'd get the limit; anything from seven years to fifteen or more. Oh, my God, no! I can't pay the price! I can't give you up!"

She put her arms around his neck and drew his head down and kissed him on the lips. "I'll wait . . . oh, boy, boy! I'll wait! But I can neither push you over the edge nor hold you back. Only don't think of me; please, *please* don't think of me!—'Whatsoever seemeth good'—that is what you must think of; that is my last word: 'Whatsoever seemeth good.'" And she pushed him from her and fled.

XLI

THE DESERT AND THE SOWN

Through streets in which the village quiet of the summer night was undisturbed save by the spattering tinkle of the lawn sprinklers in the front yards, and the low voices of the out-door people taking the air and the moonlight on the porches, Griswold fared homeward, the blood pounding in his veins and the fine wine of life mounting headily to his brain.

After all the dubious stumblings he had come to the end of the road, to find awaiting him the great accusation and the great reward. By the unanswerable logic of results, in its effect upon others and upon himself, his deed had proved itself a crime. Right or wrong in the highest of the ethical fields, the accepted social order had proved itself strong enough to make its own laws and to prescribe the far-reaching penalties for their infraction. Under these laws he stood convicted. Never again, save through the gate of atonement, could he be reinstated as a soldier in the ranks of the conventionally righteous. True, the devotion of a loving woman, aided by a train of circumstances strikingly fortuitous and little short of miraculous, had averted the final price-

paying in penal retribution. But the fact remained. He was a felon.

Into this gaping wound which might otherwise have slain him had been poured the wine and oil of a great love; a love so clean and pure in its own well-springs that it could perceive no wrong in its object; could measure no act of loyal devotion by any standard save that of its own greatness. This love asked nothing but what he chose to give. It would accept him either as he was, or as he ought to be. The place he should elect to occupy would be its place; his standards its standards.

Just here the reasoning angel opened a door and thrust him out upon the edge of a precipice and left him to look down into the abyss of the betrayers—the pit of those whose gift and curse it is to be the pace-setters. In a flash of revealment it was shown him that with the great love had come a great responsibility. Where he should lead, Margery would follow, unshrinkingly, unquestioningly; never asking whether the path led up or down; asking only that his path might be hers. Instantly he was face to face with a fanged choice which threatened to tear his heart out and trample upon it; and again he recorded his decision, confirming it with an oath. The price was too great; the upward path too steep; the self-denial it entailed too sacrificial.

"We have but one life to live, and we'll live it together, Margery, girl, for better or for worse," was his apostrophic declaration, made while he was turning into Shawnee Street a few doors from his

lodgings; and a minute later he was opening the Widow Holcomb's gate.

The house was dark and apparently deserted as to its street-fronting half when he let himself in at the gate and ran quickly up the steps. The front door was open, and he remembered afterward that he had wondered how the careful widow had come to leave it so, and why the hall lamp was not lighted. From the turn at the stair-head he felt his way to the door of his study. Like the one below, it was wide open; but some one had drawn the window shades and the interior of the room was as dark as a cavern.

Once, in the novel-writing, following the lead of many worthy predecessors, Griswold had made much of the "sixth" sense; the subtle and indefinable prescience which warns its possessor of invisible danger. No such warning was vouchsafed him when he leaned across the end of the writing-table, turned on the gas, and held a lighted match over the chimney of the working-lamp. It was while he was still bending over the table, with both hands occupied, that he looked aside. In his own pivot-chair, covering him with the mate to the weapon he had smashed and thrown away, sat the man who had opened the two doors and drawn the window shades and otherwise prepared the trap.

"You bought a couple o' these little playthings, Mr. Griswold," said the man, quietly. "Keep your hands right where they are, and tell me in which pocket you've got the other one."

Griswold laughed, and there was a sudden snapping of invisible bonds. He dismissed instantly the thought that Charlotte Farnham had taken him at his word; and if she had not, there was nothing to fear.

"I threw the other one away a little while ago," he said. "Reach your free hand over and feel my pockets."

Broffin acted upon the suggestion promptly.

"You ain't got it on you, anyway," he conceded; and when Griswold had dropped into the chair at the table's end: "I reckon you know what I'm here for."

"I know that you are holding that gun of mine at an exceedingly uncomfortable angle—for me," was the cool rejoinder. "I've always had a squeamish horror of being shot in the stomach."

The detective's grin was appreciative.

"You've got a good cold nerve, anyway," he commented. "I've been puttin' it up that when the time came, you'd throw a fit o' some sort—what? Since you're clothed in your right mind, we'll get down to business. First, I'll ask you to hand over the key to that safety-deposit box you've got in Mr. Grierson's bank."

Griswold took his bunch of keys from his pocket, slipped the one that was asked for from the ring, and gave it to his captor.

"Of course, I'm surrendering it under protest," he said. "You haven't yet told me who you are, or what you are holding me up for."

Broffin waved the formalities aside with a pistol-

pointed gesture. "We can skip all that. I've got you dead to rights, after so long a time, and I'm goin' to take you back to New Orleans with me. The only question is: do you go easy, or hard?"

"I don't go either way until you show your authority."

"I don't need any authority. You're the parlor-anarchist that held up the president of the Bayou State Security Bank last spring and made a get-away with a hundred thousand—what?"

"All right; you say so—prove it." Griswold had taken a cigar from the open box on the writing-table and was calmly lighting it. There was nothing to be nervous about. "I'm waiting," he went on, placidly, when the cigar was going. "If you are an officer, you probably have a warrant, or a requisition, or something of that sort. Show it up."

"I don't need any papers to take you," was the barked-out retort. Broffin had more than once found himself confronting similar dead walls, and he knew the worth of a bold play.

"Oh, yes, you do. You accuse me of a crime: did you see me commit the crime?"

"No."

"Well, somebody did, I suppose. Bring on your witnesses. If anybody can identify me as the man you are after, I'll go with you—without the requisition. That's fair, isn't it?"

"I know you're the man, and you know it, too, damned well!" snapped Broffin, angered into bandying words with his obstinate capture.

"That is neither here nor there; I am not affirming or denying. It is for you to prove your case, if you can. And, listen, Mr. Broffin: perhaps it will save your time and mine if I add that I happen to know that you can't prove your case."

"Why can't I?"

"Just because you can't," Griswold went on, argumentatively. "I know the facts of this robbery you speak of; a great many people know them. The newspaper accounts said at the time that there were three persons who could certainly identify the robber: the president, the paying teller, and a young woman. It so happens that all three of these people are at present in Wahaska. At different times you have appealed to each of them, and in each instance you have been turned down. Isn't that true?"

Broffin glanced up, scowling.

"It's true enough that you—you and the little black-eyed girl between you—have hoodooed the whole bunch!" he rasped. "But when I get you into court, you'll find out that there are others."

Griswold smiled good-naturedly. "That is a bold, bad bluff, Mr. Broffin, and nobody knows it any better than you do," he countered. "You haven't a leg to stand on. This is America, and you can't arrest me without a warrant. And if you could, what would you do with me without the support of at least one of your three witnesses? Nothing—nothing at all."

Broffin laid the pistol on the table, and put the key

of the safety-box beside it. Then he sat in grim silence for a full minute, toying idly with a pair of handcuffs which he had taken from his pocket.

"By the eternal grapples!" he said, at length, half to himself, "I've a good mind to do it anyway—and take the chances."

As quick as a flash Griswold thrust out his hands.

"Put them on!" he snapped. "There are a hundred lawyers in New Orleans who wouldn't ask for anything better than the chance to defend me—at your expense!"

Broffin dropped the manacles into his pocket and sat back in the swing-chair. "You win," he said shortly; and the battle was over.

For a little time no word was spoken. Griswold smoked on placidly, seemingly forgetful of the detective's presence. Yet he was the one who was the first to break the straitened silence.

"You are a game fighter, Mr. Broffin," he said, "and I'm enough of a scrapper myself to be sorry for you. Try one of these smokes—you'll find them fairly good—and excuse me for a few minutes. I want to write a letter which, if you are going downtown, perhaps you'll be good enough to mail for me."

He pushed the open box of cigars across to the detective, and dragged the lounging-chair around to the other side of the table. There was stationery at hand, and he wrote rapidly for a few minutes, covering three pages of the manuscript sheets before he stopped. When the letter was enclosed, addressed, and stamped, he tossed it across to Broffin,

face up. The detective saw the address, "Miss Margery Grierson," and, putting the letter into his pocket, got up to go.

"Just one minute more, if you please," said Griswold, and, relighting the cigar which had been suffered to go out, he went into the adjoining bedroom. When he came back, he had put on a light top-coat and a soft hat, and was carrying a small hand-bag.

"I'm your man, Mr. Broffin," he said quietly. "I'll go with you—and plead guilty as charged."

. . . . . .

Wahaska, the village-conscious, had its nine-days' wonder displayed for it in inch-type head-lines when the *Daily Wahaskan*, rehearsing the story of the New Orleans bank robbery, told of the voluntary surrender of the robber, and of his deportation to the southern city to stand trial for his offence.

Some few there were who took exceptions to Editor Randolph's editorial in the same issue, commenting on the surrender, and pleading for a suspension of judgment on the ground that much might still be hoped for from a man who had retraced a broad step in the downward path by voluntarily accepting the penalty. Those who objected to the editorial were of the perverse minority. The intimation was made that the plea had been inspired—a hint basing itself upon the fact that Miss Grierson had been seen visiting the office of the *Wahaskan* after the departure of the detective, Matthew Broffin, with his prisoner.

The sensational incident, however, had been forgotten long before a certain evening, three weeks later, when the Grierson carriage conveyed the convalescent president of the Bayou State Security from the Grierson mansion to the southbound train. Andrew Galbraith was not alone in the carriage, and possibly there were those in the sleeping-car who mistook the dark-eyed and strikingly beautiful young woman, who took leave of him only after he was comfortably settled in his section, for his daughter. But the whispered words of leave-taking were rather those of a confidante than a kinswoman.

"I'll arrange the Raymer matter as you suggest," she said, "and if I had even a speaking acquaintance with God, I'd pray for you the longest day I live, Uncle Andrew. And about the trial: I'm going to leave it all with you; I've g-got to leave it with you! Just remember that I shall bleed little drops of blood for every day the judge gives him, and that the only way he can be helped is by a short sentence. He wouldn't take a pardon: he—he wants to pay, you know. Good-night, and good-by!" And she put her strong young arms around Andrew Galbraith's neck and kissed him, thereby convincing the family party in Lower Seven that she was not only the old man's daughter, but a very affectionate one, at that.

. . . . . .

The little-changing seasons of central Louisiana had measured two complete rounds on the yearly dial of Time's unremitting and unhasting clock

when the best hired carriage that Baton Rouge could afford drew up before the entrance to the State's Prison and waited. Precisely on the stroke of twelve, a man for whom the prison rules had lately been relaxed sufficiently to allow his hair to grow, came out, looked about him as one dazed, and assaulted the closed door of the carriage as if he meant to tear it from its hinges.

"Oh, boy, boy!" came from the one who had waited; and then the carriage door yielded, opened, closed with a crash, and the negro driver clucked to his horses.

They were half-way to the railroad station, and she was trying to persuade him that there would be months and years in which to make up for the loveless blank, before sane speech found its opportunity. And even then there were interruptions.

"I knew you'd be here; no, they didn't tell me, but I knew it—I would have staked my life on it, Margery, girl," he said, in the first lucid interval.

"And you—you've paid the Price, haven't you, Kenneth? but, oh, boy, dear! I've paid it, too! Don't you believe me?"

There was another interruption, and because the carriage windows were open, the negro driver grinned and confided a remark to his horses. Then the transgressor began again.

"Where are you taking me, Margery?—not that it makes any manner of difference."

"We are going by train to New Orleans, and this—this—very—evening we are to be married, in

Mr. Galbraith's house. And Uncle Andrew is going to give the bride away. It's all arranged."

"And after?"

"Afterward, we are going away—I don't know where. I just told dear old Saint Andrew to buy the tickets to anywhere he thought would be nice, and we'd go. I don't care where it is—do you? And when we get there, I'll buy you a pen and some ink and paper, and you'll go on writing the book, just as if nothing had happened. Say you will, boy, dear; *please* say you will! And then I'll know that—the price—wasn't—too great."

He was looking out of the carriage window when he answered her, across to the levee and beyond it to the farther shore of the great river, and his eyes were the eyes of a man who has seen of the travail of his soul and is satisfied.

"I shall never write that book, little girl. That story, and all the mistakes that were going to the making of it, lie on the other side of—the Price. But one day, please God, there shall be another and a worthier one."

"Yes—please God," she said; and the dark eyes were shining softly.

THE END

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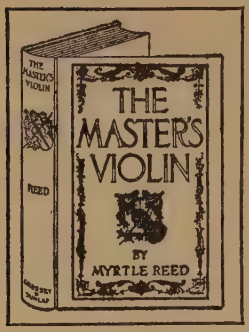

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